

A SEVENTEENTH CENTURY WESLEYAN MODEL OF YOUTH MINISTRY
IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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A FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
DAYTON, OHIO
May, 2011

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ABSTRACT

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This research project was convened at Highland United Methodist Church in Fort Thomas, Kentucky. The objective was to determine if intentionally creating ministries that fostered relational peer interaction through a multi-level approach to ministry would result in youth integrating into the life of the church. The results of qualitative and quantitative research indicated that such an approach resulted in significantly increased participation at all levels of ministry each level emphasizing a deeper relationship with Christ than the level before. As a result of this approach, several youth became worked their way through the various level systems implemented to become sold out disciples.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are so many people and churches that contributed to the formation of this ministry project and to the life of this author, and this author is greatly indebted to them for allowing him to be part of their story and for them becoming part of his story. First, to the churches and their people who helped shape the life and ministry passions of this author: Clarenceville United Methodist, Washington Congregational, Ann Arbor Christian Reformed and finally Highland United Methodist whose youth were the basis for this project. Many thanks for putting up with the idiosyncrasies of this author, and allowing him to become who he is today! May God be praised forever because of the work that was done together to change the lives of so many young people.

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INTRODUCTION

Almost every church has a desire to reach out to young people. With all the time, academic, family and peer demands upon our youth, many are forsaking the church and finding their connections, and thus their spirituality, in places other than the church.

In response, churches have utilized a variety of methods to combat this problem. Some have chosen to have an “if we build it they will come” attitude, hiring the best youth worker they can find, pouring lots of financial resources into the youth ministry, and hoping that this will solve the problem. Others have buckled down, eschewing all current culture, and decided that simply teaching the Bible unapologetically will draw the young people of the day into a relationship with Jesus. Still others have employed a variety of entertainment methods, seeker-sensitive models, and hybrids of several models in an effort to reach young people. In many communities, this community included, most young people are not at all connected in any meaningful way with a faith community. This author would define meaningful as a community where their spiritual, emotional, physical and relational needs are met, where they were in service to others, and where they would transform their lives into being sold-out disciples of Jesus Christ.

Barna and others have done significant research on why young people leave the church. The bottom line of their research endeavors can be boiled down to one statement—the church and its ministries did not meet their needs and did not have a transformative or lasting effect on them. There have been theories advanced as to why this is happening, most recently in a book entitled “Youth Ministry that Transforms”. All the surveys point to the same result—effective ministry to young people needs to be

incarnational, relational, and transformational in order to be successful and have long lasting effects. The question for us becomes, “how do we create ministry to young people that recognizes the youth culture, resides within that culture, and works within their own culture to create transformed, sold-out disciples to Jesus Christ?”

This study will build on several models of ministry, specifically John Wesley’s society, class and band system model, to create the type of youth ministry that works in our particular context. This study will examine the effects of this model of ministry first in bringing people into ministry offerings where relationships can be built and the Gospel proclaimed, and second follow the youth through a range of opportunities to determine how effective this model is on a young person’s spiritual growth as they move through the opportunities at each stage of ministry.

Chapter one will spell out the author’s life journey to date, focusing in particular on his journey as a Christian. This chapter will spell out how his journey has intersected with the ministry context of Highland United Methodist church, as well as the passions this author holds to create this ministry project. In chapter one, the reader will be able to identify the particular context, along with its strengths and weaknesses, in which God has graciously permitted this project to take place.

Chapter two looks at the state of art in ministry to youth, identifying several ideological methods of ministry. Special attention is given to youth discipleship. This chapter traces models of discipleship from before Jesus’ time to the present. A particular emphasis is placed upon how John Wesley created his model of discipleship using the society, class and band system he developed.

Chapter three explores two biblical passages (one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament). Efforts are made to examine the history of youth ministry, tracing a timeline from the earliest identification of youth ministry in England up through the experiences of youth ministry in the United States. Special attention is given to identifying a particular emphasis on Wesleyanism as a youth movement. The various forms of ministry to youth in the current time in which this project has taken place is also identified. Chapter three also explores the idea of practical theology, specifically as it relates to a relational style of ministry to youth.

Chapter four discusses the methodology used in this research project. The primary focus of chapter four describes how this project utilized qualitative and quantitative research specifically identified as helpful in practical theology.

Chapter five discusses the results of the survey materials. Observations in qualitative research used will be found here, as will more scientifically oriented quantitative research methods which were employed.

Chapter six will offer this author's assessment of the data and overall success and challenges of this particular project.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

About the writer

At the time of this writing, this author is a forty-seven year old male, married to his first wife of five years (Shelley), and is a father of four adopted boys (Ryan, Robert, Jeremiah and Joshua), all of whom have reached the age of majority, and are living on their own. This writer is celebrating twenty-eight years of full-time ministry, and is currently in his fifth year as the Associate Pastor at Highland United Methodist Church in Fort Thomas, Kentucky, a suburb of Cincinnati, Ohio.

This author was born on the 9th day of June, 1963 in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and was adopted when he was six months old by Frederick and JoAnn Karow. He was the first of six children in the Karow family. His parents thought that they were unable to have children, so they adopted four (Larry, Marney, Alan and Linda). Later in life, when this author was already in fifth grade, God blessed Frederick and JoAnn with a biological son (Eddie), who was followed several years later by a little sister (Amy). His father was a career Air Force enlisted man stationed in Oklahoma, and at the time of his adoption, his mother was a homemaker. The family moved frequently, and the majority of this writer's elementary years were spent at Ramstein Air Force Base in Germany. When this author was starting sixth grade, the family moved back to the states, and resided for the remainder of his middle and high school years in Harrisville, Michigan, a

very small community on the shores of Lake Huron, about thirty miles south of Alpena, Michigan.

Frederick was born March 24, 1940 in Saginaw, Michigan to Elmer and Anna Karow. Frederick was the oldest of three boys in the family. Elmer was a businessman, having owned and operated a baby photography business. He also collected rare coins. Anna was a devoted Christian and homemaker, and was often viewed as a faithful “church lady” at Ames United Methodist Church which was located directly across the street from her home. Elmer rarely participated in church activities, and it was left to Anna to instill Christian values into her three sons. However, Christian faith was never a large part of Frederick’s life, and there does not seem to be any sense of a personal relationship with Jesus being emphasized or accepted on the part of this author’s father; this still remains so today.

It was quite a different situation in the family of this writer’s mother. JoAnn was born to Joseph and Clara Metiva on April 12, 1941. JoAnn was the middle of three children, and the only girl. The family members were devout Christians, belonging to the Wisconsin Synod Lutheran Church in Zilwaukee, Michigan. Faith was always a very important part of the life of the Metiva family, and all the children were raised to love, honor and appreciate the value of a personal relationship with Jesus. This faith relationship carried JoAnn through some extremely trying times in her life, including the premature death of her older brother. She also made it her mission to instill in her own family a need for Christ. Her faith would serve to be a significant source of encouragement in this author’s own life, and it contributed significantly to his personal

faith and choice of vocation. This author keenly remembers watching his mother's actions during and after participating in the Lord's Supper. As children were not permitted to take communion until after confirmation, mother would leave us in the pew, kneel at the communion table and partake of the elements. She would then come back to the pew and spend significant time in contemplative prayer, often ignoring the behavior of her young brood beside her. This vision has created lasting memories in this author, and he has often revisited this memory during his own participation in communion. She was a calming presence in this author's otherwise chaotic childhood.

There exist very few fond memories of childhood or adolescence in this author's mind. For a variety of reasons, he was relationally challenged. He does not remember a single friendship prior to high school, and the few friends he had in high school would certainly not be termed "close friends". He felt a deep sense of loneliness throughout his adolescent years. He experienced a severe bout of depression around the eighth grade, which coincided with the loss of his sight in one eye.

This author grew up in a home where his father was a severe alcoholic who did not seek treatment until after this author left home for college. Life in the Karow home was often spent in hiding, or certainly walking on pins and needles so as not to raise the wrath of the father. Frederick was a mean drunk. His drinking had profound negative effects upon his marriage and family, as well as his career. When Frederick retired from the Air Force at the age of forty-two, he had attained the rank of chief master sergeant. He could have gone significantly further if the disease of alcoholism had not taken hold of him.

It was never a good idea to bring friends to the home, as one would never be able to predict in what kind of mood the father would be. When the father was drunk, he did not care who else might be around when he went on one of his tirades. This author recalls the one instance when he did bring a friend home around the fourth grade, and ended up being whipped within ear shot of his friend for some infraction. That was the last time this author ever brought anyone to his home. From that point on, any interaction with his peers was done away from the home.

This author also had some significant eye problems which were prevalent from birth. He had a “lazy eye” which resulted in his often looking cross-eyed. The strength of his glasses was enormous, and the technology of the day in eyeglasses required extra-thick lenses which others would term “coke-bottles”. Later, in the eighth grade, he experienced a retina tear in his right eye. This necessitated a trip from Michigan to the Massachusetts Eye and Ear hospital for surgery. The procedure was not successful and resulted in a shrunken eyeball. The eye was not removed, and this author spent most of eighth grade through the majority of eleventh grade wearing a pair of glasses that had one clear glass and one dark glass. He felt like an outcast. He never dated during high school, and went to his middle and senior proms as a worker. It was only late in his middle year that he was fitted for and received a glass eye, and was able to return to looking and feeling somewhat normal.

Just prior to his senior year in high school, his father was ordered to deploy to South Korea. At the end of his middle year, this author ran for class president of his high school (class size 122 seniors) and won. When he came home to inform his parents, his

father told him to “take his ass back up to the school and tell them you’re not accepting”. This author did go up to the school, but didn’t say anything. A few days later, his father shipped out. This author served his class well and received many accolades for his efforts and achievements, both from his peers and the school leadership and administration. It was only at his twenty year class reunion that the author learned he was elected as a result of an orchestrated effort against his opponent, rather than a voice of support from his classmates. Yet in spite of the reasons for winning the election, his classmates consistently affirmed his role and success in the position of senior class president.

That experience as senior class president was defining for this author. He had found that he had something to contribute and determined that he was good seeing the big picture, organization, empowering and enlisting other people to accomplish his vision. He also found out that he was, in fact, a visionary who could see beyond what had “always been done” to what possibilities can happen if one dreams big and executes well. Through his musical skills, intuitive mindset and can-do attitude, he was able to not only survive but thrive in adolescence without significant peer relationships. This author was a classic example of children of alcoholics, who learn not to trust, talk or feel. Sharon Wegsneider-Cruse developed a theory of alcoholic families, and said children in those families assume one of four roles. This author assumed the role of “The Family Hero”. Wegsneider-Cruse writes: “This child brings esteem to the family through his or her achievements, such as being on the football team, the debate team, class president, the honor roll, the cheerleading squad, etc. This child may have decided long ago that he or she is maltreated by the alcoholic parent because ‘I’m not good enough’” (which the

parent often tells the child when angry or upset). So, to try to win the parent's love, the child becomes a super-achiever. An added benefit of being the Family Hero is that it gets you out of the house a lot and away from the family.”¹ This author became, and has remained, a classic over-achiever.

During his growing-up years, one of the outlets that this author employed was music. He was a gifted musician, and music came naturally to him. By the time he was twelve years old, he was providing musical accompaniment for worship at the base chapel in Germany. His mom often told him that she could tell the mood he was in by how he played the piano. He learned to play by ear, and learned to play with emotion, a skill that has served him (and his congregations) well ever since. When his family returned to the states, he was offered a position (at two dollars and fifty cents per week) as the organist in the Lutheran church his family attended. When he was a senior in high school, he was offered the position as organist and choir director at the local Presbyterian Church, which he accepted. That same year, he was appointed by the band director as the student director of the band, and led his peers at pep rallies and basketball games. He graduated from Alcona High school in 1981.

After two years of college, he took a full time job as Music Minister at Clarenceville United Methodist Church in Livonia, Michigan. It took him the next twenty years to finish his bachelor's degree, which he did in 2004 from the University of Toledo. He remained in the church, mostly full-time, since accepting the position with Clarenceville United Methodist Church in 1983.

¹ National Church Development Corporation Sharon Wegscheider-Cruse, *Another Chance: Hope & Health for the Alcoholic Family* (Palo Alto: Science and Behavior Books, 1989), 105.

This author's spiritual life took many twists and turns. Church was never a turn-off for him; he was always willing to go with his mom and participate fully. The first sense that he had of the true presence of God was at the beginning of the Easter Sunday service when he was in fourth or fifth grade and living in Germany. He was sitting in the pew in front of his parents, as there was not enough room to hold the whole family in one pew on that particular day. The chancel area was decorated with lilies, with three very large candles placed on either side of the bible and cross which sat on the communion table. A tingling sense came upon him, and he turned and smiled at his mother. It was at this time that this author believes he was anointed for future service to the church.

He was confirmed in the Trinity Evangelical Wisconsin Synod Lutheran church in Lincoln, Michigan in the eighth grade. He learned Luther's small catechism and was always eager to participate in confirmation classes. This was the same church in which he was the organist.

Much of his adolescence revolved around adult interaction as opposed to peer interaction. He found significant affirmation in his musical abilities, which was often attained through his unique and vibrant style of congregational hymn accompaniment. He developed a keen sensitivity to the movement of the Spirit, although he had no idea that this was what he was doing.

This author experienced two distinct occurrences of a crisis of faith. The first occurred in November of 1981. He had left home to attend college some thirty miles away. He returned home during the day on November 11 for the purpose of recording the hymn "This is My Father's World" on the piano for his mother. His mother was a Sunday

school teacher at Trinity Lutheran Church in Lincoln. She wanted the recording to use in her Sunday school class the following weekend. Upon returning to his dorm, this author learned that his father and the Michigan State Police were trying to contact him. This author called his father and was informed that his mother was killed in an automobile wreck when the car in which she was a passenger was hit by a drunk driver.

This news devastated the author. His rock, his calmness in the family storm, his spiritual mentor was gone. The crisis in faith occurred when he and his father attempted to make funeral arrangements with the pastor of Trinity. The pastor had learned that his mother was attending a Bible study at the local Church of God, and he refused her a Christian burial, as she was “helping to promote a false doctrine”. After years of dedicated service to Trinity, and having taught Sunday school there just the week before, JoAnn was not afforded a burial from that church. It was at this time that this author truly wondered in his spirit how God could allow this to happen. This author questioned the existence of God. His ministry at the Presbyterian Church turned into a job, as opposed to an outlet of passion for music and Jesus. This author’s father never again participated in any type of worship service for the sake of worshipping or seeking God. He attended weddings and other family happenings that occurred in a worship setting, and on one occasion accompanied this author to his place of ministry when he was visiting, but any interest in church for his own personal growth or worship of God was gone. While his father professes belief in God and a “higher power”, he does not articulate a personal relationship with Jesus or even a desire or need for one. The rest of this author’s siblings

have the same aversion to the church and Christianity. While they are not hostile toward the faith, they certainly do not embrace Jesus in their own lives.

This author experienced his second crisis of faith when, about a year after his mother's passing, he returned to Trinity for a visit. When it came time for communion, he went up to partake but was denied communion by the same pastor who denied his mother a funeral service. He was informed that he was excommunicated for "helping to support a false doctrine", that doctrine being that of the Presbyterian Church.

It was early in his ministry at Clarenceville United Methodist Church, about two years after his mother's death, that this author was convicted that simply going to church did not mean one was a disciple. He was challenged in his faith, and at a youth camp where he was one of the leaders, he gave his life to Jesus in its entirety. From that point on, his job in the church became a ministry and a calling, and his vocation in life was to serve Jesus and his Church. He has sought out ways to live a life worthy of his calling, has engaged in accountability relationships with mature Christians, and has developed in Christian character, virtue and ministry abilities.

One way this author found to exercise his Christian faith was to invest in others. As a result of his troubled childhood, he developed a passion for young people who found themselves marginalized, abused and cast out by society. In 1986, he met the director of a foster care agency who encouraged him to become a foster parent. He did that and found it to be a good fit. Over the next 24 years, this author fostered over seventy of the most difficult to place teenagers in the foster care system, and ended up adopting four of them out of foster care. The last one turned the age of majority this past year (2010), and has

moved on to his next phase of schooling. It was this author's strong faith in Jesus, life experiences, fortitude, creativity and willingness to take risks that allowed him to be successful at foster care. Many young lives were changed, and these young people knew that there was someone in this world who would love and care for them in spite of their backgrounds, personalities and behaviors. Four of them found a permanent family.

During his time as a foster parent, this author became very good friends with the secretary of the agency with which he worked, Shelley Lynn Dobrzynski, and after dating for over ten years, they were married. At the writing of this paper, they have been married for five years. This author and Shelley decided to continue to foster those that were in the home, but not to take any additional youth. They are now empty nesters.

After becoming a Christian, this author's career remained with the church, the majority of it being full-time, with a focus on worship and music ministry. His tenure at his churches was substantial, lasting a minimum of seven years at each placement. While the Director of Music and Worship Arts at Ann Arbor Christian Reformed Church, this author sensed a calling to go to seminary with the intention of learning how to create authentic, biblical worship experiences, and to learn to minister pastorally to those in his care. It was during his time at Western Theological Seminary that he discovered a gifting and a passion for preaching. He earned a Master of Divinity degree from Western in 2008. Toward the end of his seminary education, this author made a decision to pursue a ministry of Word and Sacrament. This led him to accept a position as Associate Pastor with Highland United Methodist church in Fort Thomas, Kentucky. In his role as Associate Pastor, this author is responsible for worship planning, youth ministry, senior

adult ministries, local missions, and pastoral care. It is within the context of his position with youth that this project finds its origins.

This author's faith and life experiences have combined to form his passion for young people, especially developing an ardent desire that young people would find healthy, affirming and transformational relationships with God and with each other. This author finds himself in a very unique context at present; quite different from his own previous life and ministry experiences.

The context for this ministry project is Highland United Methodist Church in Fort Thomas, Kentucky. The youth in his current location of Fort Thomas generally are not from outwardly dysfunctional families, as were his foster and adopted children. It is quite the opposite, as this community is full of upwardly mobile families who move into Fort Thomas because they find the school system to be the best in Kentucky. The parents in this community are fully invested in their youth. While it is clear that some dysfunctional families exist, they certainly are not readily visible. In fact, families go to great lengths to hide their dysfunctionality. Many do not even recognize it, and indeed their form of dysfunction takes on a very different look than what this author has experienced in his own life and in previous ministry positions. This community pushes its youth to excel in areas of academics and athletics. It would be easy for one to surmise that overachieving is part of the dysfunctionality of the families in this community.

Yet this author finds himself hurting for these young people. They do not know what they are missing; they are so engrossed in their overachievement that they do not

recognize that the very thing they long for and were created for—a relationship with Jesus—is not being fulfilled as they try to be the best at soccer, football or academics.

The church in this project context is very supportive of its youth in general, providing ample financial, physical and people resources to meet the needs of the young people in the church and the community. It is extremely accepting of new ideas, and has created an environment where new programs and ways of relating can be explored and developed, thus providing an excellent opportunity to discover how to meet the deep-seated need that every human has to connect with the Creator—in this case primarily focusing on the youth of our community.

The community is very close knit. There is a sense that one is considered an “outsider” until he has resided here in excess of thirty years. This author has not attempted to break into the establishment of the community by ignoring this rule, but rather has learned that creating new establishments seems to be an accepted way of accomplishing his goals. For example, attempting to become a chaplain for the football team would not be acceptable in this community as an outsider, but creating opportunities to feed the football team and providing activities such as a 5th quarter seem to be enthusiastically supported.

This context also provides a unique geographical location that is ripe with opportunity for accomplishing this author’s passion for reaching youth. The church is located directly across the street from both the Middle and Senior high schools, and as such is uniquely visible to the community. An additional opportunity is afforded this church in that Fort Thomas is a walking town; the school does not bus students, so with

very few exceptions, the youth must pass by this physical location to get to the school building twice per day.

As a result of the context in which this author finds himself, and his life experiences, the synergy for this project will be in the area of connecting youth with the Church, other Christians, evangelizing and helping them to fulfill their inborn desire and need for a relationship with Jesus.

Context of Ministry Setting

The Church

Highland United Methodist Church proper is located at 314 N. Fort Thomas, Fort Thomas, Kentucky in zip code 41075. The church is located in the center of town, right across from the high school and on the edge of the town plaza. The front double doors are painted bright red, and lie at the base of a 100 foot tower steeple which sports turrets where the steeple incline begins. There is a wide open space in front of the church building which has been turned into the city plaza through a joint effort of city and church leaders in 2003. The physical building immediately attracts the eye when one comes around the bend of North Fort Thomas Avenue.

Demographics of the Community

Fort Thomas, Kentucky is located on the Ohio River, right across from Cincinnati, Ohio. Fort Thomas is surrounded on the north, east and south by the Ohio River and by Interstate 471 on the west. It is a bedroom community of Cincinnati, Ohio, which is a 5 minute drive from downtown Fort Thomas to downtown Cincinnati.

The demographic data provided here is accurate as of 2007, and was received from Claritas through the United Methodist Church, a copy of which can be found in appendix "A".

The population within a 1 mile radius of the church building most accurately reflects the demographics with which this church is most likely to connect. This community is not one that people stumble upon; one cannot cut through Fort Thomas on their way to anywhere else. The demographics in a three to five mile radius change substantially, as Fort Thomas is bordered by Newport and Covington, which are significantly less affluent communities.

The population within a 1 mile radius to the church property totals 9,689. This represents a decline of 8.1 % over the last seven years. Over the next five years, the population is projected to decline by another 4.9%. The median age is 39.3; the average age is 39.2. 96.6% of the community is Caucasian, 1% is African American. The average household income is estimated to be \$68,450, and is expected to increase 10.6% over the next five years. 3.5% of the population lives at or below the poverty line as established by the Federal government.

For this area, 53.5% of the populations over the age of sixteen are employed. Of those, 15% are blue collar, 73.9% are white collar, and 11% are service and farm workers. 18.3% are in management/business/financial operations, 27% are in professional occupations, 10.9% are in service occupations, 28.7% are in sales and office professions, 6.7% are in construction, and 8.3% are in production/transportation/material moving professions. 32% of the employed population travels less than fifteen-minutes to get to

work, 46% travel between fifteen and twenty-nine minutes, and twenty-one % travel over thirty minutes to reach their work destination.

From an educational standpoint, 14.2% of the population the age of 25 has earned a Master's Degree or higher and 23.1% has earned a Bachelor's degree.

Sixty-four percent of the homes in this community are owner occupied single family structures, and 35% are estimated to have been built before 1939.

The family make up of this community includes 54.72% being married and living with their spouse, 25.01% having never been married, 10.41 % who are divorced, and 7.95% who are widowed. 5.53% of the population contains children who are not yet in school, 11% of the population is in elementary school, and approximately 6% of the population attends middle high or high school.

Demographics of Highlands Middle and Senior High Schools

Since this writer's project is based upon the youth in the community (youth being defined as sixth through twelfth grade), this writer finds it helpful to delineate the demographics of this particular target group.

The High School is very highly rated in the Commonwealth of Kentucky, having won numerous awards and offering significant extracurricular activities. The high school offers many AP (Advanced Placement) courses. We the People and the Speech/Debate Teams were state champions and national competitors in 2008. The football team and girls' track team were state champions from 2007 to 2009. In 2010, the high school football team (the Bluebirds) was ranked number three in the Commonwealth, and

number 224 in the nation.² The Middle High and High School offer many extracurricular activities and are heavily invested in sports. Additionally, community soccer is a large part of the life of many youth in our community. Highlands is a 2008 “High Schools That Work” Gold Achievement High School, one of only 16 in the nation. Highlands is a member of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and a permanent member of the College Board. Highlands is the only public high school in Kentucky to hold membership in the prestigious Cum Laude Society³.

From an educational standpoint, the Fort Thomas School system has ranked in the top 7 schools in the Commonwealth for the last two decades. In 2008-2009 school years, Fort Thomas Independent Schools were ranked third out of 149 school districts in the Commonwealth academically⁴; Highlands High School ranked third out of 249 high schools in the commonwealth.⁵

This writer’s personal observations indicate that in our community, youth are not opposed to the Gospel, but they have no “felt need” for Jesus. They are immersed in their academics and their sports, and thus church is an after-thought, if a thought at all. The priorities of the community dictate that young people excel in both academics and sports, and church (as a result of a relationship with Jesus) is often not a consideration.

² Max Preps, "High School Football" <http://www.maxpreps.com/high-schools/JR15UBLP9k2JnWbMH8o7MQ/highlands-bluebirds/football/home.htm>. Accessed November 21, 2010.

³ Fort Thomas Independent School District, <http://www.fortthomas.kyschools.us/>. Accessed November 10, 2010

⁴ School Digger, <http://www.schooldigger.com/go/KY/schools/0204000428/school.aspx> (accessed November 22 2010). Accessed November 21, 2010.

⁵ Ibid.

Recently, Highland United Methodist participated in the National Church Development Evaluation. On a scale of 100, all eight areas of evaluation scored at thirty-five or higher, which puts our church in the top fifteen percent of churches in the world⁶. This is an increase over 2002 (when our church last took this survey), where the church's highest score was fifty seven. This indicates that this church is growing internally (and not just numerically). The weakest scores were in inspiring worship services and fostering a culture of spirituality.

Highland United Methodist is one of six protestant churches in our community and is complemented by two Catholic parishes. Highland United Methodist has the largest weekly attendance at worship amongst the protestant churches. Overall, less than twenty percent of the census of Fort Thomas is in worship in our community on any given Sunday. This figure was obtained by surveying the churches within the community for two consecutive weeks and comparing it to the census count of Fort Thomas. While this does not take into account those who attend church outside of our community, or those who are otherwise regularly involved in a faith community but are unable to attend on a particular Sunday, this does indicate that the mission field in general is wide open in Fort Thomas.

Highland United Methodist holds three services of worship weekly. The first service is traditional in nature and celebrates the Lord's Supper weekly. Attendance averages sixty-five persons, most of who are over the age of fifty. The second service is contemporary in nature, is led by a praise team, and has an attendance average of 95. This

⁶<http://ncd-international.org/public/?jsessionid=79309AAF359D0F3F25EFEFA8AA76B183>, accessed 11/14/2010

service is attended primarily by middle aged people with families. The third service is a blend of traditional and contemporary, is led by the choir and organ, and has a mixed demographic attendance of approximately 150 weekly.

Highland United Methodist has taken its mission to serve the needy in the community seriously. While those demographics do not exist on a large scale in our immediate area, they are surrounded by substantial need in neighboring communities. In the summer of 2010, the church served slightly fewer than 28,000 meals to low income children in cooperation with such entities as the YMCA, Ida Spence Mission, and the Covington Housing Authority, as well as the church Vacation Bible School program. The food service is run primarily by youth between the ages of fourteen and nineteen, and supervised by this author.

Highland United Methodist is a leader in the ecumenical ministerial association. Through the initiative of this church, Highland United Methodist has partnered with the association to present “Community Connections”, a concert series during the summer which is intended to bring together the churches and the community to affect the building of relationships with our non-churched friends and neighbors.

Context of Youth Ministry

The youth ministry at Highland United Methodist has grown numerically over the last several years from approximately a dozen in youth ministry to an average of over sixty on a weekly basis. This swells to well over 100 for special activities and events.

This is due in no small part to the efforts of a children’s minister who, over the last six years, has cultivated a highly effective children’s ministry which has become a

feeder source to youth ministry. Additionally, the church offers a preschool program that is well attended and well respected in the community.

In 2004, Highland United Methodist undertook an exercise in which it determined its purpose and calling as a branch office of Christ's church in Fort Thomas. Its members took stock of how God has blessed them and the wealth of resources placed at their fingertips and in their community. As a result of this exercise, the church made a determination that it needed to capitalize on its location and proximity to the middle and senior high schools, and it became intentional about investing in its youth ministries.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY MODEL

“Go to any place where young people meet—a burger bar or a disco, football match or a rave—and you will find large numbers, loud music, energy, enthusiasm and a strong sense of group loyalty.”¹ This is a great description of youth culture today and is a starting point for many effective youth ministries, including the context for this body of research. Unfortunately, many ministry models do not take youth ministry past this particular point, and as a result, have not seen growth in the spiritual maturity of their intended audience. Mark Yaconelli pulls no punches when he advocates a model that goes beyond the fun and games of most youth ministry experiences:

Today’s popular youth ministry models are creative, dynamic, and fun. Yet something’s missing. In a typical youth group, how many kids actually encounter the resurrected Christ? Does our focus on youth directors, curricula, and programs crowd out opportunities for kids to experience God? I think a youth program is effective only when it offers kids the space, tools, and time to encounter God’s transforming love. We often invite kids to live their lives in Christ through our words and lesson plans, but we rarely find ways for them to actually practice this life. They need us to equip them with the skills to develop a transforming intimacy with God.²

¹ Education Church of England. Board of, *Youth a Part : Young People and the Church; a Summary and Guide to the Report* (Church of England, Board of Education, 1996), 1.

² Mark Yaconelli, "Ancient-Future Youth Ministry," *Group* 1999, 34-35.

Youth ministry needs to be concerned with the total personal and spiritual growth of our youth.

“Youth ministry needs to be concerned with all facets of each young person’s life, and not just with those that are called religious concerns. Total youth ministry addresses those ‘secular’ concerns that young people face—their studies, their future, their family life, their friendship, their abilities and talents, and their identity. And it brings faith in God to bear upon them. Ministry which helps young people discover and honor their unique gifts and find their own place in the world enables them to become who they are truly called to be by God.”³

Understanding that youth is a unique time of personal development, one must realize that young people are struggling with change in all aspects of their lives—physically, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually, and they need to feel accepted, affirmed and loved if they are to come into a discipling relationship with Jesus.

Current State of Ministry to Youth

The years of adolescence are wrought with change, confusion and uncertainty. Defining adolescence can be tricky, but it is important to wrap some defining words around it to give a sense of some parameters of the demographic of which we speak. “Adolescence is not a blend of both child and adult, nor is it an expanded phase of either. Adolescence is a unique phase of life that must be understood and dealt with on its own merits.”⁴

³ Mark C. McCann, *Relational Youth Ministry--a Core-Team Model* (Winona: Saint Mary's Press Christian Brothers Publications, 1995), 16.

⁴ Chap Clark, *Hurt : Inside the World of Today's Teenagers, Youth, Family, and Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 27.

Chap suggests that there is a fifteen year period of adolescence, and within that fifteen year period there are three stages of adolescence: early, middle and late. The early period is when young people hit puberty (ages ten to twelve—different for boys than for girls) through middle high; the mid stage would be considered a person's senior high years, and the late stage, which would be considered early college years. The transition from early to mid adolescence (from middle to senior high) is a “dramatic and sometimes traumatic experience”⁵ for the adolescent and his/her parents. It is at this stage that it begins to dawn on young people that their life is going to change dramatically, and it is here that they begin looking at their friends in different ways. It is in this stage where mid-adolescents really begin to realize that they need to separate themselves from their family systems in their quest to become who God created them to be. It is here where their friendship cluster begins to take on immense importance as the safe haven for authenticity and acceptance in their lives.

Adolescents' physical bodies are changing, often at a rate that is very different from their peers. They question if they are “normal” in this area. They become very self-conscious about how they are developing physically. Hormones are kicking in, and they are developing sexually. Ministry needs to take these things into account; students do not want to be embarrassed in front of their peers.

Adolescents also are developing intellectually; they can organize facts and figures, but are just acquiring the ability to conceptualize thoughts and abstract thinking. Ministry tools are very different at varying stages of development; one tool doesn't fit

⁵ Ibid., 83.

everyone's learning capabilities. Adolescents are able, as well, to apply reason to the boundaries placed upon them, and to reason out a moral code—one given by God through the faithful witness of Scripture and people, or one that the world—especially their peers—gives to them.⁶

Adolescent young people are also developing emotionally. Their emotions fluctuate not only day-to-day, but often hour by hour or even minute by minute. Their concept of time and space is still developing. “Young people can express a childlike dependency one moment, then get offended by the lack of independence they're granted the next.”⁷ Ministry environments need to create a safe and accepting place for young people to congregate and share.

They are developing socially. They are very self-conscious. “Who am I?” “What am I about?” “Do I have value?” “Do people like me?” These are all questions that young people are asking themselves during adolescence. Ministry needs to recognize their need for socialization, and provide multiple opportunities across a wide spectrum of size and style to accommodate their social growth needs. The relationships that they form at this stage of their life are crucial to how they view and interact with God and others. Dunn reiterates the importance of relational interaction among teens with these words: “The security of attachment, the wisdom of moral goodness and the strong twin towers of personal value and efficacy are found in relationships with God and his people.”

⁶ Richard R. Dunn, *Shaping the Spiritual Life of Students : A Guide for Youth Workers, Pastors, Teachers & Campus Ministers* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 124.

⁷ Mark Yaconelli, *Contemplative Youth Ministry : Practicing the Presence of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006), 32.

They are also developing spiritually. They want a personal faith. They may question the existence of God, or how God is relevant in their own lives, but they want to explore; they want to know. They have a deep yearning for spiritual connectivity. It is the role of youth ministry to connect them with the true source of their fulfillment—a life giving relationship with Christ.

Chap Clark talks about young people feeling abandoned by adult society as they enter this phase of their lives. He said that in the 1960's, "society in general moved from being a relatively stable and cohesive adult community intent on caring for the needs of the young to a free-for-all of independent and fragmented adults seeking their own survival, and individual adolescents found themselves in a deepening hole of systemic rejection. This rejection, or abandonment, of adolescents is the root of the fragmentation and calloused distancing that are the hallmarks of the adolescent culture."⁸ As a result of their feeling abandoned, they have responded by creating a "separate and highly structured social system."⁹ They have concocted their own world; they band together for a sense of safety. They develop relationships where they know they are accepted and welcomed. Their primary focus in life is relational safety.¹⁰ They gather together in groups to create this sense of safety.

Though varying models and approaches to youth ministry exist, and churches are not ignoring youth ministry, as a whole youth ministry is not as effective as it once was, nor as effective as it could be. The participation of youth in churches is in a decline, and

⁸ Clark, 32-33.

⁹ Ibid., 59.

¹⁰ Ibid., 63.

the sustainability factor (youth that remain connected to church after aging out of the youth ministry) is in a deplorable state. Statistics show that two-thirds of youth drop out of church between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two.¹¹ A list of ten top reasons for dropping out of the fellowship of the church is given: 1) needed a break, 2) church is judgmental or hypocritical, 3) moved to college, 4) work, 5) moved and too far to commute, 6) too busy, 7) didn't feel connected, 8) disagreed with church's stance on political or social issues, 9) other priorities, and 10) was only going to church to please others. In a nutshell, church was irrelevant to their lives. Of those eighteen to twenty-two year olds who had left the church, seventy-eight percent indicate that the church was not important in their lives.¹²

Towns attributes dropout rates rather directly when he says: "One of the main reasons why teenagers drop out of church is that they know the facts of doctrine, but never experienced Jesus Christ in their heart."¹³

In a research survey titled "*What's Happening? The State of Youth Ministry In Canada*", research indicated that the most important aspect or method of youth ministry is the building of relationships. At least 95% of each group of leaders' surveyed (paid church leaders, volunteers and parachurch employees) indicated that relationships were

¹¹ Thom S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer, *Essential Church? : Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts* (Nashville: B & H Books, 2008), 2.

¹² Ibid., 83.

¹³ Elmer L. Towns, *Successful Biblical Youth Work*, [Rev. ed. (Nashville,: Impact Books, 1973), 36.

the conduits to influence in young people's lives.¹⁴ They indicate that it's tougher to be a teen in today's world than when they grew up. Their methods of communication rely heavily on technology, but adults find it difficult to interact with the culture they find their youth engaging through social media outlets.¹⁵

The Barna group, in a survey in 2007, determined that young people are looking to connect with God, and with the church. The most important things that teens are looking for in the church are to help them connect with God, learn about their faith, and serve others in a loving and relational environment.¹⁶ The study also explored teenagers' expectations related to church. The most common elements sought by young people were "to worship or make a connection with God" (45% described this as very important) and "to better understand what I believe" (42%). About one-third of teens said they wanted "to spend time with close friends" (34%), "to get encouraged or inspired" (34%), or "to volunteer to help others" (30%).¹⁷

Young people today are passionate about a lot of things. They love justice, mercy, fairness. They are not as black-and-white in their thinking as perhaps the previous generations were. Yet they are passionate...extremely so. Kenda Creasy Dean posits that perhaps one of the reasons for the decline of youth participation in our churches is due to

¹⁴ March Penner Don Posterski, Christ Tompkins, *What's Happening? The State of Youth Ministry in Canada* (Canada: Muskoka Woods, 2009), 65.

¹⁵ Ibid., 85.

¹⁶ <http://www.barna.org/teens-next-gen-articles/93-what-teenagers-look-for-in-a-church>, Accessed October 9, 2010

¹⁷ Ibid.

the fact that our churches have not connected the “passion of youth with the passion of faith.”¹⁸ She writes: “Maybe it is because the church, like the greeting card industry, has largely sanitized love of suffering, leaving Christianity with a mealy-mouthed niceness that fails to ring true to young people who know in their bones that love and heartache go together.”¹⁹

Current Voices, Methodologies and Trends in Youth Ministry

Entertainment Model: Made popular in the 70’s and 80’s, this model brought youth into the context in which Christ could be proclaimed by having cool rock bands with all the bells and whistles. Secular music was used as an entry point, and sometimes words were changed to make the music religious. (This is not without precedence; Wesley did the same thing. “O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing” was a bar tune that Wesley used for theological lyrics.) In the 90’s, it changed to include cutting edge technological presentations. Worship is often the front door of this style of youth ministry. Within this model, Ludwig breaks out two approaches that one could create. The first is called a “structured program model”. This was the primary model of ministry in the 60’s, and remains the primary model today. In this model, a book/devotional/curriculum becomes the content for the meeting; some call these

¹⁸ Kenda Creasy Dean, *Practicing Passion : Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Pub., 2004), 4.

¹⁹ Ibid., 4-5.

“canned” programs. A second variation would be the Planning Program model, whereby a topic is selected, and everything else is designed around that topic.²⁰

Sally Morgenthaler says that this model’s effectiveness has run its course. “Gone are the days when we could just advertise an event—when all we needed was a big budget, stage, glitz, and special effects—and hundreds would come. Kids today have literally seen it all. You can be sure that whatever you come up with to “wow” them, they’ve already been there and done that. We have to remember that most kids need an authentic relationship with us before they walk through the youth room doors. When they get up the courage to come, it’s because they literally want to meet the God they’ve been sensing in our lives. Amazingly enough, that’s what they assume church is about...connecting with God. If we make the mistake of equating technology with a high-impact, spiritual experience—if we forget that technology is simply a tool—we’ve missed the point entirely.”²¹

Young Life would fall into this category. They have done an outstanding job with creating programs that grab our youth’s attention, using the latest gimmicks, the finest camping programs, and the highest quality of entertainment. The challenge in their model is that they do their ministries outside of the congregations and give “salvation an individualistic spin and considerably truncate the range of Christian practices available to students. Furthermore, Young Life’s explicitly relational methods tend to capitalize on

²⁰ Glenn E. Ludwig, *Building an Effective Youth Ministry*, Creative Leadership Series (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 68-69.

²¹ Tony Jones, *Postmodern Youth Ministry : Exploring Cultural Shift, Creating Holistic Connections, Cultivating Authentic Community* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Youth Specialties, 2001), 85.

the socializing forces of the high school, sometimes reinforcing norms of passion (e.g., popularity) that contradict the passion of the gospel.”²²

Seeker driven: Pioneered by Willow Creek Community Church, this model seeks to make the church relevant to youth. They often meet in places like shopping malls, warehouses and clubs where kids might hang out. They seek to blend into culture. Oftentimes, these ministries will have two distinct types of ministries happening; one for believers and one for non-believers. They do not use Christian phrases. They seek to minister to those who have either had no church experience or have had a negative church experience.

The challenge with this type of ministry as it relates to young people is that there is a tendency to downplay the cross and anything religious in their bid to become culturally relevant. The end result to youth ministry was that they “often managed to avoid the concept of atonement (and its pesky theological companion, sin) altogether. Without a doctrine of sin, divine-human reconciliation was unnecessary, allowing ministry to convert divine passion into a form of righteous energy directed toward human reconciliation instead. This approach made Christianity seems intellectually viable, and tended to promote an acceptance of ‘otherness’ and participation in social transformation... (it) tended to replace costly grace with a cheerful, facile optimism that reduced redemption to human betterment—with sacrificial love nowhere in the picture.”²³

²² Dean, 39.

²³ Ibid., 45.

Mark DeVries is one of the leading youth ministry experts, and would fall in both the seeker and purpose driven camps. Since 1986, Mark DeVries has served as a Pastor for Youth and Their Families. He is also the founder of Youth Ministry Architects, a coaching service for churches experiencing significant transition in their youth ministries.

Incarnational: All successful models of youth ministry will have an incarnational aspect to them. Incarnational follows the model of Jesus who was pleased to “come and dwell among us” (John 1:14). As adults, we choose to cross our natural social boundaries in our desire to share Jesus with young people.²⁴ More often than not, we are traveling outside of our comfort zones to build relationships with young people—with whom we have little in common. We go to places where youth congregate—and rarely will you see other adults in those places. Incarnational ministry realizes that there is “no substitute for being around young people on their own territory.”²⁵ Once significant relationships are built, the youth worker has potentially earned the right to proclaim the Christian message with the young people in such a way that they are empowered to make a response to the God whom they are hearing about. The youth worker moves aside in his or her relationship with the young people, and allows space for God. The next step in incarnational ministry is that the young person starts to explore the possibilities of the Christian faith, and ways in which that faith can become real within their own culture.

²⁴ Pete Ward, *Youthwork and the Mission of God : Frameworks for Relational Outreach* (London: S.P.C.K., 1997), 43.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

In this model of ministry, it is important that one embraces the culture of youth. Some churches will demur bringing the culture of youth into their own culture. However, if the two cultures do not intersect at some point, ministry cannot happen.

“The time we spend in informal contact with young people forms the basic resource for our verbal proclamation of the gospel. If we cut short informal time, or if we dispense with it altogether, we have no guarantee that what we are doing is a contextualization of the faith. The likelihood is that as we share the faith we impose our own culture at the same time...being with young people gives us the ability to see the gospel through their eyes so that when we come to ‘translate’ the message for them, we do so out of a respect and intimacy with their own subculture and social context.”²⁶

Purpose Driven – This model encourages ministry to ask why we do what we do. This model advocates that purpose, vision and mission statements be the center of youth ministry planning. Doug Fields, former teaching and student pastor at Saddleback Community Church in California is probably the foremost expert in this style of youth ministry. He now leads an organization specifically created to equip others to lead a Purpose Driven Youth Ministry (PDYM). He has authored over fifty books, and is the creator and developer of simplyyouthministry.com.

Postmodern— many would argue that we are living in a postmodern world, and youth ministry must reflect the times in which we live. The common name given to churches that are actively engaged in ministry to postmodern people as a primary purpose is known as the Emerging Church. The Emerging Church seeks to study and engage their culture. They see themselves on a mission to the world. They consider themselves as cross-cultural in the sense that they are “crossing into the broader culture through

²⁶ Ibid., 95.

proclaiming the good news within that cultural context.”²⁷ They seek to reverse the trend of church being irrelevant to culture. Rainer says: “The American church is dying...the church is losing influence in culture. Local churches are having trouble relating to their local community and the younger generation.”²⁸ David Kinnaman led a three-year study on how people view Christians and Christianity. In his book entitled “Un-Christian”, he identifies a new generation of young people as “mosaics” (born between 1984 and 2002 and the generation born after the Busters). He says that they enjoy challenging the rules and are extremely skeptical.²⁹ Similar to the Busters, relationships are the driving force for Mosaics. They have a strong sense of a need to belong to a “tribe” of people who are loyal to them, know them well and will appreciate them, and they are highly loyal.³⁰

“Spirituality” is a key buzzword, but not necessarily spiritual Christianity. Postmodern youth are subjective, question everything, and believe that truth is in the eye of the beholder. “Seven out of ten thirteen-to twenty-four-year-olds in this survey (Referring to an Associated Press/MTV Poll on happiness) state that while their religion is vital to their lives, other religions and belief systems are probably true as well. Our nation’s youth are looking for more in life but they are not finding it. The spiritual journey makes them happy, but this journey does not lead them to the ultimate fulfillment

²⁷ Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches : Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2005), 16.

²⁸ Rainer and Rainer, 8.

²⁹ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian : What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity-- and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2007), 21.

³⁰ Ibid., 22.

found in Jesus Christ.”³¹ Yet fewer than one in ten of those surveyed indicated that their faith is their top priority.³²

To the postmodern, stories are the primary means of communicating. For them, stories “are not about what happened. They’re about what’s going on inside us. They are about the deep hiding places in us that show up and reveal not only us, but God’s fingerprints on our lives.”³³ Brian McLaren calls this “adductive as oppose to deductive or inductive reasoning.”³⁴ They value experiential learning in a pluralistic society. They are altruistic, communal creative and concerned with the environment. They see life as holistic; they believe that life is one in which every area is touched and influenced by another area. They value authenticity. Jones describes it as a shift from “being relevant to being real.”³⁵ Youth ministry in this trend emphasizes the prophetic voice; to be the light in the world. Youth ministry must engage culture authentically. Sally Morgenthaler puts it this way: “We will earn the right to draw others into the subtle rhythms of grace as we seek humble engagement with the incarnate gospel.”³⁶ Dan Kimball says that we must do this in such a way that we “resist clinging to modern methodologies, despite their past—and even current—successes. We must completely rethink what it means to engage

³¹ Rainer and Rainer, 33.

³² Kinnaman and Lyons, 23.

³³ D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church : Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2005), 21.

³⁴ Jones, 27.

³⁵ Ibid., 37.

³⁶ Ibid., 43.

and dialogue with teens.”³⁷ Youth ministry in postmodernism is more missional and less program oriented. Brian McLaren, Doug Padgitt, Lenoard Sweet and Mike Yaconelli (Youth Specialties) are key figures in this movement.

.Models of Discipleship

Ministry to youth generally falls into one of two categories, either evangelism or discipleship. “In evangelism, we are concerned with youth who have not yet made an initial faith commitment; our aim is to bring them to the point of accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. In discipleship we are concerned with youth who have made that commitment; our aim is to enable them (together with ourselves) to live more fully as Christ’s disciples in the world.”³⁸ While this author posits that the majority of youth ministry programs currently in existence (and many of the models listed above) have their primary focus on the evangelism side of things, it is this author’s philosophy and goal that once evangelized, a young person should move into the arena of becoming a disciple. It is only at that point that one truly experiences a lasting, transforming, life-changing experience.

The main focus on this body of research is upon moving young people from an entry level experience with the church to becoming fully devoted, sold out disciples of Jesus Christ. Thus, it makes sense that our model of ministry would be focused upon discipleship at all levels of involvement in the life of a youth. Age, emotional maturity,

³⁷ Ibid., 44.

³⁸ Jeffrey D. Jones, *Youth Ministry : Making and Shaping Disciples* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1986), 45.

spiritual maturity, openness to the Spirit, family structures, outside influences, demands upon a young person's time and energy all contribute to varying degrees of ability and/or willingness to explore a deeper level of discipleship with Jesus.

To disciple, literally translated, means to teach. Jesus was a teacher. He spent the majority of his time teaching the twelve disciples in order to lay the “foundations of leadership for the faith communities which would be established to take his message to the world.”³⁹ Discipleship, according to Collinson, “is an intentional, largely informal, learning activity in which two or a small group of individuals, typically in a community holding to the same religious beliefs, make a voluntary commitment to each other to form a close, personal relationship for an extended period of time, to enable the disciples to learn from each other...Christian discipleship is intended to result in each becoming an active follower of Jesus and a participant in his mission to the world.”⁴⁰ Yet, while teaching may be a component of discipleship, it is but a small component. The primary component of making disciples of Jesus Christ is intimate relationships. Christian discipleship is a process “that takes place within accountability relationships over a period of time for the purpose of bringing believers to spiritual maturity in Christ.”⁴¹

Jesus' Model of Discipleship

Jesus made concrete, particular and unique demands upon his disciples. Those who wanted to be one of his disciples accepted the requirements without reservation.

³⁹ Sylvia Wilkey Collinson, *Making Disciples* (Cumbria, U.K: Paternoster Press, 2004), 97.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁴¹ Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship : Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 129.

They always had the freedom to step aside. Jesus accepted them for who they were, but certainly sought to move them further in their living out of those requirements.

Jesus called his disciples to give up every possession that they had, to abandon their lifestyles, and to pursue a life that was totally different than anything that seemed normal to them. They willingly submitted themselves to Jesus and his demands.

Collinson says that these were “learners who were expected to grow in their knowledge and understanding of God and his kingdom. This would not just be evidenced through academic cognizance but would result in growth in their faith relationship with God affecting their attitudes, values, qualities of character, behavior and skills for continuing the works of Jesus.”⁴²

Jesus created a faith community in which his disciples could learn and grow. This was a safe community, where they could be themselves, warts and all. He did this within the context of community where they could develop close, personal relationship with each other and with Jesus. It embodied love, commitment, concern for all, humility, meekness and vulnerability. They learned from Jesus, they learned about themselves, and they built each other up through encouragement, accountability, and shared ministry. This wasn't a fellowship club; it was a call to radical relationships. Jesus was “requiring a depth of relationship that would be much more demanding, and much more enriching and

⁴² Collinson, 98.

powerful. He wanted them to find their identity as true sons and daughters of God, which included a total commitment both to himself and to all others within God's family."⁴³

There is a decision that must be made by anyone who desires to be a disciple of Jesus. Many people come and seek out who this Jesus might be. James and Andrew wanted to know if Jesus was "the One" whom they were seeking. Jesus answer to them was to "come and see". Only after they had an opportunity to ascertain who Jesus was did Jesus issue the call to them to "follow" him. "This concept is integral to the nature of discipleship. Jesus is the one who must be in the lead position on his terms."⁴⁴ Youth today are longing to see and understand Jesus. "The human heart, be it young or old, longs to experience the presence of God. Religious words and symbols, no matter how inspiring, are not enough. We all desire to know God for ourselves. "Don't just tell me about Jesus," young people seem to say. "Let me meet Jesus for myself."⁴⁵

Jesus did a lot of teaching. He taught the crowds. But when it came down to it, he picked only a few to become disciples. The church is a place where a significant amount of teaching takes place to the masses—sermons, Sunday school lessons, and things like that. But when it comes right down to it, discipleship has more to do with relationships than it does mass teaching. Whereas preaching and teaching can be done by a lone individual, "discipleship is fundamentally a relational process"⁴⁶ that requires a

⁴³ David Watson, *Discipleship*, Hodder Christian Paperback (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981), 42.

⁴⁴ Ogden, 80.

⁴⁵ Yaconelli, *Contemplative Youth Ministry : Practicing the Presence of Jesus*, 181.

⁴⁶ Ogden, 67.

community of believers. Those who hear preaching and teaching can be passive; there is no requirement to act. Preaching and teaching, however, can point one in the direction of opportunities that exist for developing and making discipleships—in small relational settings. As Ogden puts it, “Discipling relationships are marked by intimacy, whereas programs tend to be focused on information.”⁴⁷

Other Models of Making Disciples

There are many models that are important components of disciple making. Teaching and preaching provide the truth of Scripture, while small groups provide the intimacy. It seems to this author, that a hybrid of both of these models is necessary for effective discipleship, a model that encompasses Truth (teaching), Intimacy, and Accountability.

In his book, *The Disciple Making Church*, Hull picks up on a model of disciple making that Jesus used with his disciples. He lists three stages. The first is the “come see” stage. This is where we celebrate that we are in Christ, we interest the non-believer in Christ, and we offer support to people in larger group settings. In the second phase, the “come follow me” stage, we guide people as the community of believers, and help them discover their giftedness. In the third phase, which he entitles the “come and be with me” phase, we equip and empower people to become leaders and multiply themselves.⁴⁸

The most prevalent model around seems to be the “schooling” model. This model seems to have been around since the fourth century when Christian schools were first

⁴⁷ Ibid., 124.

⁴⁸ Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church* (Old Tappan, N.J.: F.H. Revell Co., 1990), 23.

established. This continued throughout the Middle Ages and was kept alive when Universities surfaced in the late twelfth century. The Protestant Reformers relied heavily upon the schooling method. The primary tool of the schooling model is lecture and discussion, but often is accompanied by other tools (especially as society has come to appreciate that people have many different learning styles). As will be discussed in Chapter Three of this work, the Sunday school model was widely used in England and the United States as a tool of discipleship.

Another model of discipleship has come to be known as the “small group”, “cell group”, or “house church”. This model draws upon the premise that long-term, close, personal friendships within the group enable discipleship through shared experiences and mutual goals and desires to be disciple and disciplers. These small groups “contribute to the nurture, teaching and pastoral care of their members and cater for individual differences within a heterogeneous community of faith.”⁴⁹

Wesleyan Model of Disciple Making

The New Testament times were ushered in by the group of disciples with Jesus as their leader. They met in homes (John 1:38-39, Luke 19). Their meetings were often centered on breaking bread together (John 21:12, John 6:1-11, Luke 5:27-28). Jesus urged the disciples to meet with people in their homes (Matthew 10:11) in smaller, intimate settings. The New Testament Church had its beginnings as a small group prayer

⁴⁹ Collinson, 220.

meeting (Acts 2) and the church was meeting from house to house sharing their possessions and their lives.⁵⁰

In 1727, following the model of the early church, Charles Wesley began a club at Oxford University. The activities of this club included Greek and Hebrew Bible studies, study of the classics, visiting the poor and sick, as well as the tutoring or instruction of children. It was known by different names: Bible Moths, the Reformers' Club, the Godly Club, the Enthusiasts, and the Holy Club. Because of their methodical nature of doing things, someone dubbed them "Methodists" and the name stuck.⁵¹ Out of this endeavor, was born the roots of John Wesley's model of the class and band system of disciple making.

In 1738, Wesley had his conversion experience at Aldersgate, and made it his goal to "spread scriptural holiness throughout the land."⁵² England was in the beginning of its Industrial Revolution, and was not experiencing much holiness. The official state church, the Church of England, was catering primarily to affluent people, and ignoring its biblical mandate. "Religion had lost any real impact in the daily lives of the people."⁵³

Wesley was deeply influenced by the Moravians. He latched on to their penchant for pietism and holy living, and his experience with the Moravians profoundly shaped how he would operate. Wesley was also deeply supportive of the Anglican Church, and

⁵⁰ C. T. Winchester, *The Life of John Wesley* (New York, London,: The Macmillan company; Micmillan & co., ltd., 1906).

⁵¹ Charles Claude Selecman, *The Methodist Primer* (Nashville,: Tidings, 1947), 11.

⁵² D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting : A Model for Making Disciples* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Pub. House, 1997), 18.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 20.

struggled to hold true to the structure and ideals of the Church of England. He was an ordained priest in this movement, and sought to live out his vows until he could do so no more. His breaking point was this church's refusal to ordain priests within his Methodist movement so that the common people could obtain the sacraments. The Anglican Church's emphasis on order was ingrained in Wesley, and this quest for order remained a significant component of everything Wesley undertook.

One of Wesley's colleagues in the Holy Club of his Oxford days, George Whitfield, had become an enthusiastic street preacher. Whitfield had been banned from the pulpits of the churches in England because of his popularity with the common people (who would overwhelm the church of the upper class, affluent society of the established church), and as a result took his preaching to the streets and fields. He invited Wesley to join him, hoping to appoint him his successor as Whitfield had intentions of going to the United States on a mission endeavor to an orphanage in Georgia. Wesley, an Anglican priest, was at first reluctant because of his penchant for church order (and field preaching was anything but orderly), but when he saw the effectiveness of Whitfield's evangelistic efforts, he took up this model of ministry for himself.

The origin of the class meeting actually morphed into a discipleship group out of another need arising from the effectiveness of Wesley's field preaching efforts. Wesley was meeting at the Bristol meeting house in England for which he was personally indebted, and it was in need of constant repairs. Money needed to be raised. A meeting was held which was attended by several captains of merchant ships, among them, a man named Captain Foy who was a member of the Society in Bristol. Searching for ideas, Foy

suggested that “everyone in the society give a penny a week and it will easily be done.”⁵⁴ Those present took on eleven of the “poorest” in the society each, and weekly met with them to take up a collection for the purpose of retiring the debt on Bristol house and its upkeep. Meeting with their charges, they discovered significant spiritual need among them. For a variety of reasons, specifically accountability amongst the group, it was decided that the best way to proceed in dealing with people’s spiritual needs was for them to meet together weekly where inquiries were made into the conduct of each member and advice or reproof followed. The official “class meeting” was born.

While Wesley clearly understood the benefits of field preaching, he quickly determined that mass evangelism did not have lasting effects. With his passion for order and discipleship, the society-wide class meeting was organized. Quoting Henderson:

“Whitfield had initiated and popularized mass evangelism to the unchurched, but Wesley organized the movement and brought it under systematic management. Whitfield hoped that those who had been ‘awakened’ would follow through on their own initiative. Wesley left nothing to chance. He made sure that those who were serious about leading a new life were channeled into small groups for growth in discipleship. These little meetings were later called ‘classes’ and formed the backbone of the Methodist reformation for the next century. The ‘class meeting’ turned out to be the primary means of bringing millions of England’s most desperate people into the liberating discipline of Christian faith.”⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Samuel Emerick, *Spiritual Renewal for Methodism* (Nashville: Methodist Evangelistic Materials, 1958), 16.

⁵⁵ Henderson, 28.

The effect of Wesley's preaching made people aware of their sin. They came to Wesley for advice and counsel. He "advised them to meet with one another so that they might pray for each other and strengthen one another in their faith."⁵⁶

As a result of evangelistic field preaching, England experienced a spiritual awakening. Beginning in the nineteenth century, historians began to acknowledge Wesley's impact in England. His impact on England was compared to Voltaire's impact on France during the same period of time. A French historian posited that the Wesleyan movement in England spared that country the bloodshed that did not escape France. "The revival in England in the eighteenth century was due in large part to John Wesley's class meeting."⁵⁷ Wesley's impact in England "is an illustration that long-lasting spiritual transformation is not the product of dynamic preaching or of correct doctrine. It comes only through serious disciple-building, in keeping with Christ's Great Commission to "go into all the world and make disciples."

Wesley's class meeting was the instrument by which preaching and doctrine were harnessed into spiritual renewal."⁵⁸ Henderson quotes Dwight L. Moody: "The Methodist class meetings are the best institutions for training converts the world ever saw."⁵⁹ Through these classes, "believers were held accountable to God by one another.

⁵⁶ John Smith Simon, *John Wesley and the Methodist Societies* (London,: The Epworth press, 1923), 100.

⁵⁷ Basil Miller, *John Wesley, the World His Parish* (Grand Rapids, Mich.,: Zondervan publishing house, 1943), 82.

⁵⁸ Henderson, 31.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 93.

Without this closely knit organization and Wesley's active leadership of it, the revival he sparked could have simply faded away."⁶⁰

The largest group was the "societies" (synonymous with what one now would identify as a 'congregation'), which held jurisdiction over all the groups. Straight forward, easily understood sermons that focused on ethical and practical teaching became schools of holy living, and provided the instruction for personal spiritual development. In order to be a member of the society, one must also be a participant in a "class".

The class system purposed "reprove, instruct, and exhort one another", and was specifically developed for the "more serious among them" (referring to those who had been converted to Christianity).⁶¹ As the class identification changed throughout Wesley's development of it, one could analyze the ultimate purpose of the class to encompass "fellowship, conversion and discipleship, financial accountability and discipline."⁶² There were several levels of participation that created a hierarchy of groups based upon the readiness and participation of a participant at a lower level. One could move from one level to another simply on the basis of faithfulness alone.⁶³ The focus on level movement was not based upon agreement with the doctrine being taught, nor even on moral perfection, but primarily on the willingness of the participant to cooperate with

⁶⁰ United Methodist Church (U.S.) and George E. Koehler, *The United Methodist Member's Handbook*, Rev. & expanded. ed. (Nashville, Tenn.: Discipleship Resources, 1997), 43.

⁶¹ Henderson, 44.

⁶² Andrew Goodhead, *A Crown and a Cross, the Rise, Development, and Decline of the Methodist Class Meeting in Eighteenth-Century England* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 143.

⁶³ Henderson, 47.

the group guidelines and rules for participation. If their behavior threatened the cohesion of the group or blocked its normal function, they were asked to leave. They were not removed from the group for a failure to meet expected standards in behavioral change. Wesley felt strongly that by being obedient and working the program, the heart would soon follow and true transformation would take place.⁶⁴ Later, Wesley would institute a ticket system, which each member of a class would receive quarterly at either the hands of Wesley or the class leader. Those who were “lax in their attendance or their life would not have their ticket renewed.”⁶⁵ In extreme cases, those who would not reform could be expelled from the society.

The class level was primarily used for teaching and instruction, often in a lecture format. Another level was the “band” level at which no teaching was allowed, but rather time and effort was devoted to confession and sharing of individual spiritual life journeys. A similar model today is used in Al-Anon meetings whereby each member of the group was expected to respond to the presenter with appropriate words of affirmation, encouragement, suggestions and support. “Hearty thanksgiving and praise to God accompanied and affirmed every step of progress; loving and understanding sympathy and encouragement bolstered personal failures.”⁶⁶ The purpose of his groups (both bands and classes) was to “elicit behavioral response rather than intellectual dialogue.”⁶⁷ Later,

⁶⁴ Ibid., 116.

⁶⁵ Coke & Moore, *The Life of John Wesley* (London: G. Paramore, 1792), 235.

⁶⁶ Henderson, 102.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 72.

Wesley developed two additional groups, the first being the “select society” for the most serious among the classes and bands. This group comprised those whose enthusiasm had worked their way up through the ranks of the class meeting, society, and band, and were considered by both their peers and leaders to be the standard-bearers of the movement. The second group was the “penitent band” which was for those with significant social and moral issues requiring more “stringent and forceful treatment.”⁶⁸ Henderson identifies very simply the purpose of each level in Wesley’s system. “The society aimed for the head, the class meeting for the hands and the band for the heart.”⁶⁹

Goodhead makes some important distinctions between the different levels of groups. As it was developing and being fine tuned, each different group took on different purposes and meanings. From 1740 (a continuation of Moravian practice) the Methodist’s used simply a society (congregation) and band (small group) system. In 1742, the class became a “compulsory group”, which pushed the band meeting into a group for serious believers. The class welcomed those who were seeking, and the class was the entry point to the society (at this time, every person in the society needed to belong to a class). “The sole condition of membership of the class was the desire to flee from the wrath to come and actively seek faith.”⁷⁰ It was at this point and time that the class system became the focus of the Methodist movement as opposed to the focus being placed upon the societies. The society was now made up of everyone involved in a class, and the band

⁶⁸ Ibid., 80.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 112.

⁷⁰ Goodhead, 159.

groups were reserved for those who were “pressing after perfection with the class acting as an introductory and discipling group. The band was further subdivided into select bands for those who had attained perfection, and penitential bands for those who had slipped from the state of perfection.”⁷¹ According to the “rules of the Fetter Lane Society”, Wesley was thoroughly convinced that this form of organizing his ministry was mandated according to the Bible, specifically James 5:16: “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”⁷²

Further, Wesley found that the class system was a return to the societal norms of the first-century Christians. In his Rules for the Societies, and the Societies’ subsequent division into classes and bands, he saw the “very thing that had been characteristic of earliest Christianity”. He continues:

“Those whom God had sent forth preached the gospel to every creature....But as soon as any of these were so convinced of the truth as to forsake sin and seek the gospel salvation, they immediately joined them together, took account of their names, advised them to watch over each other, and met those catechumens (as they were then called) apart from the great congregation (society) that they might instruct, exhort, and pray with them and for them according to their several necessities.”⁷³

Wesley writes about the impact the class meeting had on the Methodist movement:

⁷¹ Ibid., 160.

⁷² Ibid., 306.

⁷³ Henderson, 105.

“It can scarce be conceived what advantages have been reaped by this little prudential regulation. Many now experience that Christian fellowship of which they had not so much as an idea before. They began to bear one another’s burdens, and naturally to care for each other’s welfare. And as they had daily a more intimate acquaintance, so they had a more endeared affection for each other. Upon reflection, I would not but observe, this is the very thing which was from the beginning of Christianity.”⁷⁴

The effectiveness of Wesley’s system is rarely, if ever, doubted. Winchester writes: “It is difficult to conceive of a form of association more profitable for the early Methodist—however it may be for later ones—more likely to promote a practical every day religion than this class meeting, in small groups of people of similar tastes, occupation, and social position for counsel on all matters pertaining to the daily conduct of life.”⁷⁵ The effectiveness of Wesley’s system lies in seven major hallmarks of his philosophy: 1) Human nature is perfectible by God’s grace, 2) learning comes by doing the will of God, 3) Human nature is perfected by participation in groups, not by acting as isolated individuals, 4) The spirit and practice of primitive Christianity can and must be recaptured, 5) Human progress will occur if people will participate in “the means of grace”, 6) The gospel must be presented to the poor, and 7) social evil is not to be resisted, but overcome with good.⁷⁶

This project takes our understanding of Jesus’ method of discipleship along with what Wesley developed in the society/class/band/select class/penitent class model, and

⁷⁴ Holland Nimmons McTyeire, *A History of Methodism* (n.p.: 1884), 301.

⁷⁵ Winchester, 99.

⁷⁶ Henderson, 128-129.

combines it with academia's ongoing knowledge and development of discipleship to create a unique model of ministry to youth in the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Old Testament Foundation – Psalm 78:1-8

¹ O my people, hear my teaching;
listen to the words of my mouth.

² I will open my mouth in parables,
I will utter hidden things, things from of old—

³ what we have heard and known,
what our fathers have told us.

⁴ We will not hide them from their children;
we will tell the next generation
the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD,
his power, and the wonders he has done.

⁵ He decreed statutes for Jacob
and established the law in Israel,
which he commanded our forefathers
to teach their children,

⁶ so the next generation would know them,
even the children yet to be born,
and they in turn would tell their children.

⁷ Then they would put their trust in God
and would not forget his deeds
but would keep his commands.

⁸ They would not be like their forefathers—
a stubborn and rebellious generation,
whose hearts were not loyal to God,
whose spirits were not faithful to him.

As leaders of young people—leaders who desire to see youth come into a relationship with the living God—we look to Scripture as our guiding instruction manual. The chosen Psalm reminds us how God has worked with and through his people throughout history, and prompts us to instill in our youth the lessons learned from others’ relationships with God. We are called to remember so we don’t repeat the mistakes of those who came before us. We are challenged to teach our young people from generation to generation so that the Lord’s name and character will be carried on—and will result in lives lived for God.

Psalm seventy-eight is for us a reminder of how God has worked in the past, and a road map for us to avoid the errors of the Israelites and enjoy constant favor and communion with God. Psalm seventy-eight is a Psalm of remembrance for the people of Israel. As a community of faith, Israel was a “people with a precious memory. Very early she settled on a memory of promise and deliverance. She regarded these memories as normative for all her life and faith.”¹ Israel was shaped by these memories, and each time her people encountered a new situation, they relied on their collective memory to find fresh answers, steeped in history and tradition, to attack the new problem. As the remnant of Israel, we Christians rely as well on the history and traditions of Israel to form new ways of addressing current issues.

Our world today is much like the Israelites’; taking God for granted, going on with our daily lives as though God did not matter, and assuming (even demanding) that

¹ Walter C. Brueggemann, *The Vitality of the Old Testament Traditions* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 11.

God will continue to meet our daily needs. Callan puts it this way: “Throughout her history, it seems, Israel misunderstood the meaning of her chosen state and all the extraordinary blessings she received and enjoyed. She appeared to accept everything as if due her and deserved by her.”²

In general, the Psalms belong to the third division of the Hebrew Old Testament, and were originally called the *Writings* or *Hagiographa*.³ The Psalms followed the books of the Law and then the prophets. Within this section one would find the Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Canticles, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Edras-Nehemias, and the two books of Chronicles. In Jesus’ day, the Psalms occupied the first place of this section of the Hebrew writings, and has remained in this place of prominence in the majority of Hebrew biblical manuscripts. For Brueggemann, the placing of this Psalm in this particular place is due to the fact that Psalms is a “response to God’s miraculous interventions as Creator and covenant-maker...for the Psalms constitute the quintessential articulation of Israel’s faith in the primal utterance of Israel in speech back to YHWH in affirmation and in distress, and in testimony to the world concerning the wonders of YHWH. The book of Psalms is an ancient mapping of Israel’s

² Charles J. Callan, *The Psalms, Translated from the Latin Psalter, in the Light of the Hebrew, of the Septuagint, and Peshitta Versions, and of the Psalterium Juxta Hebraeos of St. Jerome* (New York, London,: J. F. Wagner; Herder, 1944), 350.

³ *Ibid.*, 2.

life...that has continued through the centuries to be the primal guide for faith and worship in both the synagogue and the church.”⁴

The Psalms were meant to be sung to musical accompaniment. The Psalms were intended for God’s chosen people to use as the “hymnbook of Israel”.⁵ The Psalms were used by the Israelites as a liturgical resource.

This Psalm speaks directly to the people of Israel, using the idea of the extended family to pass the message on from one generation to the next. The concept of family in ancient Israel was not at all like the nuclear family (2.3 children with adults) we enjoy now in our culture. However, as in our current culture, the family, in all its various forms, is a basic social institution around which many other things in society are structured.⁶

In ancient Israel, there were three levels of the family structure, all operating at the same time. The upper (and largest level) was known as the ‘tribe’. This is an autonomous group of families who “believe they are descended from a common ancestor.”⁷ In the time that this Psalm was probably written, there were two large tribes. The northern kingdom was known as the “household of Omri”; the southern kingdom of Judah was known as the household of David.

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2003), 277.

⁵ Callan, 16.

⁶ Patricia Dutcher-Walls, *The Family in Life and in Death : The Family in Ancient Israel : Sociological and Archaeological Perspectives*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies (New York ; London: T & T Clark International, 2009), 1.

⁷ Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel : Its Life and Institutions*, The Biblical Resource Series (Grand Rapids, Mich. Livonia, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co. ; Dove Booksellers, 1997), 4.

The next step down from the tribe was the clan. The clan consisted of several related families. Often times, they would inhabit a geographic settlement (some large, some small), but would all be immediately related to each other in some fashion. The head of this family unit was the eldest male. This “clan” would include not only blood relatives, but those who resided with the clan as well. It consisted of the patriarchal head, all unmarried sons, wives, daughters and daughters-in-law in addition to the servants employed within the clan. This definition also extends to the smallest unit, the “family” who are the immediate blood relatives of the patriarchal head of this household.

The members of the family were a unified group. They had an obligation to help protect one another.⁸ They shared a sense of responsibility for the physical well being of the entire household, as well as the teaching and passing on of tradition. It is in this familial structure that we find this Psalm directed to the generations of “families” in Israel to pass on to each other.

This Psalm was used in the family as a teaching tool, according to Brueggemann. He suggests that Israel created an informal method of teaching its young through a process of “socialization into the lore and moral vision of the community.”⁹ He suggests that there are two elements in this socialization which were carried on “particularly in the family, though perhaps in larger family units such as the clan or tribe.”¹⁰ The first was that children were “inducted into the narrative lore of the family...the narrative account

⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *Reverberations of Faith: A Theological Handbook of Old Testament Themes* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2002), 57.

¹⁰ Ibid., 56-57.

of its past (was) immensely important.”¹¹ He reminds the reader that Exodus called for the adults to be prepared to answer young people’s questions (Ex. 12:26-27). Such stories are to invoke the memories of God’s “interventions and transformations” in Israel’s history in order to make God “present and credible in the community into the next generation.”¹² A second element in this socialization/educational process was to share lessons learned through lived experience, primarily through the Proverbs, but also in the passing on of the memories of Israel’s existence as demonstrated in this particular Psalm.

Brueggemann underscores the importance of Israel’s testimony as a genre that he calls “concrete utterance”. He suggests that this is a valid form of criticism in and of itself; attempts at other forms of criticism (he specifically mentions historical criticism) are “hopeless enterprises”, and one should not “want more than the text”.¹³ He places this particular Psalm within this genre of “concrete utterance” by saying “This speech is summons, demand, assurance, and invitation to belong to this community of utterance and to the world uttered by this community, including the God at the center of this uttered world.”¹⁴ He states emphatically that these “utterances are indeed constitutive of reality”. Israel regularly speaks a particular world into availability.”¹⁵

¹¹ Ibid., 57.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 722.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 723.

The dating of this Psalm is in dispute by various scholars. Dunn posits that Psalm seventy-eight is probably dated at some point between the exile of the northern kingdom which we know occurred in 721 BC, and that of the southern kingdom in 586 BC.¹⁶ Verses 62-64 as well as 67 indicate that the exile of the Northern Kingdom must have already taken place, but that the monarchy of Judea was still in place. The exile of the southern kingdom had not yet taken place, as indicated by verses 68-70. Thus, the probable dating of this Psalm is between 721 and 586BC. Krauss used the connection between the Deuteronomistic view of history (Deuteronomy is usually associated with the reform of Josiah¹⁷) and wisdom poetry found in this Psalm to suggest it had a postexilic dating.¹⁸ Zorn also supports this dating by the familiarity of the writer with the teachings of Deuteronomy.¹⁹ While Callan agrees that this Psalm is most definitely pre-exilic, but states that it cannot be determined if it was written before or after the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 721 B.C.²⁰ Eerdmans and O. Eissfeldt argue for an earlier dating of this Psalm (as early as 930 BC) on the basis that King David had reached the end of his historical reflections and the fact that the division of the kingdom in 930 BC

¹⁶ James D. G. Dunn and J. W. Rogerson, *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003), 476.

¹⁷ J. W. Rogerson and J. W. McKay, *Psalms*, 3 vols., *The Cambridge Bible Commentary*, New English Bible (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 130.

¹⁸ Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150 : A Commentary*, 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 124.

¹⁹ S. Edward Tesh and Walter D. Zorn, *Psalms*, *The College Press Niv Commentary*. Old Testament Series (Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1999), 80.

²⁰ Callan, 339.

upon Solomon's death is not mentioned in this Psalm, and so therefore probably had yet to take place.²¹

Psalm seventy-eight gives us a view of a large time span of the history of Israel, God's chosen people. Cox says that this Psalm is a witness to "Israel's infidelity to vocation."²² He wants Israel to understand that the implication of their "religious vocation (is) as real to a prospective third generation as it had been to the first."²³ In this Psalm, we see God constantly showering his people with blessings, showing them his goodness, his power, his strength. We see the people of Israel turning away from God, and experiencing the punishment that is accompanied by that same turning away. We see the people of Israel playing with God, "flattering him with their mouths, lying to him with their tongues" (vs. 30-31). Even though God kept revealing himself to his people, they kept rejecting him. This Psalm "recounts the history of the people of Israel in order to draw lessons from it—lessons as to who God is, what he has done, how the people responded to him wrongly in the past, and how they should learn from those past failures today."²⁴ Goldingay says the purpose of this psalm is "not merely to record the past but to change people for the future."²⁵

²¹ Kraus.

²² Dermot Cox, *The Psalms in the Life of God's People* (Middgreen England: St. Paul Publications, 1984), 44.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1994), 645.

²⁵ John Goldingay, *Psalms*, 3 vols., Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2006), 479.

Broyles identifies this as a teaching Psalm that is broken into two styles/levels of teaching. He identifies the first as having to do with the “personal decision the current generation of listeners face”, and the second having to do with the “corporate tribes and God’s elected program for Jacob-Israel”.²⁶ He speaks of a change in God’s favor—originally with the Northern Kingdom and the tribe of Ephraim, but now concentrated upon the southern tribes of David. This was in tandem with the moving of the tabernacle (which God rejected in verse 60) from the north to the south. Brueggemann states that this shift legitimized Jerusalem. While God rejected them, God also “chose afresh; Israel is invited by Yahweh into a new political possibility.”²⁷

Psalm seventy-eight is the seventh of the twelve Psalms of Asaph. Asaph was one of three leaders of music under David in the temple worship (the other two being Meham and Ethan; 1 Chronicles 15:16-19). Asaph was appointed to sound bronze cymbals during the ceremony when the ark was brought to the new tabernacle (1 Chr. 15:1–19). David appointed Asaph to serve “by giving constant praise and thanks to the Lord God of Israel” (1 Chr. 16:4, 5 lb) and to lead Israel in a special psalm of praise (1 Chr. 16:7–36)²⁸. His descendants lived in Judah after the exile of the Israelites (1 Chr. 9:15) and

²⁶ Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms*, New International Biblical Commentary. Old Testament Series 11 (Peabody, MA: Paternoster Press, 1999), 317.

²⁷ Brueggemann, Walter. *Abiding Astonishment : Psalms, Modernity, and the Making of History*. 1st ed. Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991, 20.

²⁸ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1988), 209.

served as gatekeepers in the Temple (1 Chr. 26:1). He was also described as David's private prophet (1 Chr. 25:1–2).²⁹

Most scholars categorize this as the first of the historical Psalms (the others being Psalms 105, 106 and 136). Brueggemann indicates that these Psalms belong together because of their content and style of presentation, but reminds us that they express “very different theological points, meet very different liturgical needs and serve very different social-liturgical functions.”³⁰ Kraus states that the category of Psalm seventy-eight is difficult to determine because it is unique amongst the Old Testament Psalms, but nonetheless also classifies it as a historic Psalm.³¹

While this Psalm clearly is historical in nature, it is not, however, chronological. It recounts some of the most important events in the life of God's chosen people. It begins with an explanation of the reason for writing this Psalm (to remind or instruct God's people as to what he has done for them), recalls Israel's exodus from Egypt and return to Canaan (vs. 9-39), then recounts some of their experiences in Egypt (vs. 42-51) and then the exodus (vs. 52-55). McCullough divides the material as follows: summons to the people to listen (verses 1–8); disobedience of the fathers (verses 9–20); manna and quails (verses 21–31); waywardness of the nation (verses 32–39); (5) the exodus in

²⁹ Ibid., 115.

³⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *Abiding Astonishment : Psalms, Modernity, and the Making of History*, 1st ed., Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 17.

³¹ Kraus, 122.

retrospect (verses 40–55); Israel in Canaan (verses 56–66); and finally, God’s continuing guidance (verses 67–72).³²

Psalm seventy-eight is also the twelfth of the *maskil* Psalms. The word *maskil* (שָׁכַל) is a Hebrew word with uncertain significance. It appears that the root of the word means to “understand” or “ponder”, and thus some translate the meaning of this word as “instruction” or something similar. Other sources seem to suggest that *maskil* is possibly a technical term relating to the manner of a psalm’s performance, and/or a class of composition. The word could also be translated here as “a didactic poem,”³³ as it recounts the history of the Israelites from out of Egypt through the time of the Judges and on to David. Another author translated this as מָשַׁל [*mashal* /maw·shal/] with the thought that this was a form of teaching that the hearer could “see” with his mind’s eye.³⁴ The use of the word “parable” in verse two seems to lend some credibility to this thought. Further, Jesus quotes Psalm 78:2 in Matthew 13:35 to indicate that speaking in parables fulfills this prophecy.

Krauss indicates that the presenter of this psalm is very likely a Levitical Priest who “turns to the community like a teacher of wisdom and addresses it with ‘my people’ in the manner in which the wisdom teacher addresses his student with ‘my son’.”³⁵

³² Robert G. Bratcher and William David Reayburn, *A Translator's Handbook on the Book of Psalms*, Helps for Translators (New York: United Bible Societies, 1991), 680.

³³ Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1873), 523-522.

³⁴ George Angus Fulton Knight, *Psalms*, Daily Study Bible--Old Testament (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 29.

³⁵ Kraus, 123.

In verse one, we see the word תּוֹרָה which is translated “torah”, and as such this teaching was a teaching of law, and not simply a nice story.

There is a phrase in verse two that indicates that the things about to be told are “hidden things”. This is interesting in the sense that the hearers of this Psalm would have been overly familiar with the stories contained herein (as they are all factual), and so the hearers would have been familiar with these sayings in some form. This generation was still by and large from the oral tradition, and these stories would have been known well enough to pass down from generation to generation, so in a literal sense, there is no conceivable way that these stories could have been previously hidden from them. This author posits that what is meant here is that one can only see these deeds as acts of God Almighty when they can be seen with eyes of faith.

The purpose of this Psalm could have come from a few different occasions. Like all Psalms, the “general institutional context can be identified as the cult, or the worship life of Israel”.³⁶ One theory posits that it came about as a result of the removal of the sanctuary from Shiloh in the tribe of Ephraim to Zion in the tribe of Judah, and the resulting shift in power and importance from one tribe to the other. This theory suggests that this Psalm is a rebuke to the people under the leadership of Ephraim, and the resulting divine judgment for that rebellion. This was an ongoing pattern, a continuation

³⁶ Frederick C. Tiffany and Sharon H. Ringe, *Biblical Interpretation : A Roadmap* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 176.

of the character of their ancestors in Egypt. Another theory is that this sermon may have been presented to a congregation at one of the national festivals.³⁷

Message

While the overriding structure of this Psalm is one of a historical nature, recalling the relationship between God and Israel, there is also an overarching theme that this author finds particularly useful for this body of research. That is the theme of remembrance. In all of the back and forth between what God has done for his people, and how they continually turn from his ways, the reason that they turned from God seems to be that they “forgot” or they “did not remember” what God has done for them. In verse 11, the Lord’s people of Ephraim were defeated because they “forgot”. In verse 42, we see that they entered into a pattern of rebellion because they “did not remember”. Baal Shem Tov, founder of the Hassidic movement in eighteenth-century Poland, said, “Forgetfulness leads to exile, while remembrance is the secret of redemption.”³⁸ This provides to us a clue as to the power of memory—if only they remembered God’s statutes, if only they had not forgotten what God had done for them, they would have lived obediently to God and triumphed over their enemies. Jesus himself gives to us a remembrance of all the work that he did for us in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, the ultimate “memorial feast”.

We also see in these verses a distinct pattern of redemption. It starts with the redemption of the people of Israel in their exodus from Egypt; continues with

³⁷ Knight, 78.

³⁸ Robert B. Hughes and J. Carl Laney, *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*, The Tyndale Reference Library (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 219.

redeeming of Israel from their enemies in the parting of the Red Sea, the plagues visited upon Egypt and God overcoming every power against his people; and gives a very clear example that God always protects his people.

God's provision is also very evident. He provides for them food in the desert, and he provides for them the ultimate gift of the promised land, their holy land. He knows the needs of his people, and through his great love (and in spite of their constant rejection of that love), he takes care of his people.

Theological Reflection

Psalm 78 commands us to listen to the history of God's redemptive work with his people, and then to store that knowledge to memory and pass it on to our children and the generations that are to come. This author is reminded that this was primarily an oral society, and as such, these stories would have been passed down through stories around the dining tables, in the synagogues, and as a child is sitting on his parent's knee. These stories were to be committed to memory so that not only could the hearers pass them on to the next generations, but also those stories would be internalized within the hearers' own spirits so that they themselves would not repeat the rebellious actions of those that went before them.

The admonition begins in verses one and two, and cautions the hearers that they are to be listeners of history; listeners of God's redemptive work in history. This, after all, was a Psalm of instruction. Then, in verses three through eight, they are admonished to pass these stories on to their children and children's children so that the mistakes of the people of God in the past are not repeated by future generations. A responsibility for

telling future generations of God's ongoing work of redemption is placed squarely at the doorstep of the current generation. Smith suggests that we are holders in trust of the truth of who God is and what God has done. "The trust of truth had been committed to the speakers by their ancestors to pass on to future generations."³⁹ This is a sacred trust, not to be taken lightly.

The psalmist does not beat around the bush. Matthew Henry says that "his instructions are his *law* or *edict*; such was their commanding force in themselves. Every good truth, received in the light and love of it, will have the power of a law upon the conscience."⁴⁰ There is no ambiguity here. It is not an option. It is a command. Richards puts it this way: "Let's not hesitate to share what God has done in our lives with our children. They will see and come to know Him through what we impart" (v. 7).⁴¹ Our responsibilities as parents and leaders to our children directly impact how (and if) they will come to know God as their redeemer, their protector, their provider, and their judge.

For this project, then, it will be important for us to explore the role of parents and leaders in our children's lives. While the thesis of this project is that the young people in this particular community have set other priorities in their lives over God, the question begs to be answered as to what role the parents and leaders in these young people's lives play in their disregard for the things of God. One must also assess whether the church is

³⁹ James E. Smith, *The Wisdom Literature and Psalms*, Old Testament Survey Series (Joplin, Mo.: College Press Pub. Co., 1996), 77.

⁴⁰ Matthew Henry, Leslie F. Church, and Gerald W. Peterman, *The Niv Matthew Henry Commentary in One Volume : Based on the Broad Oak Edition* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub. House, 1992), 78.

⁴¹ Larry Richards, *The Bible Reader's Companion* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1991), 368.

fulfilling its role as Christ's body to equip parents and leaders to understand and pass on these stories to the generations that will come after us.

Within context; vs. 9-73; A Circle of forgetfulness, rebellion and redemption

In our community, our youth are over programmed, and seek after things on their own merit. This Psalm is a story of how the Israelites abandoned God to rely on their own abilities. The Israelites failed miserably, and were constantly returning to God, only to leave him once again when they felt self-sufficient. Our youth are self-sufficient (or are enabled by their parents and other adult influences in their lives to rely on everything but God—their own talents, their material resources, and the resources of the community at large, specifically the educational system within our community). While Psalm 78 gives us a picture of a cyclical relationship with God, this author posits that many have never been told in such a way that these stories and their message would be ingrained within their lives, the stories of God's redemptive activity in the world and in those people around them. Their material world and other blessings shout out to them in such a way that the voice of God whispering (or even yelling over the roar of the world) escapes their hearing.

Willmington notes that “the more they received, the more they rebelled” (vs.12-33).⁴² This will prove to be a worthwhile thought in the development of this body of research in that our society today has been given great blessings of material wealth and opportunity, yet society seems to be more rebellious and forgetful of God than ever. “God's bounty,” Willmington continues, “had been rewarded by ingratitude and

⁴² H. L. Willmington, *Willmington's Bible Handbook* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1997), 317.

rebellion (78:17–20, 30–33). Therefore, God sentenced them to “failure” as they wandered in the desert” (78:33; see Num. 14:29–30, 35). One wonders if the rebellion of today’s society, particularly youth, in all their abundance of blessings, will be rewarded with their own “failures” as they wander their own spiritual desert.

Summary

Verse five tells us that through his giving of the law and his testimony in Jacob, God’s love is so wonderful, and so far reaching that it initiates all relationships with God. Psalm 78 is a retelling of history where God’s people have rebelled, and continue to be pursued and brought back into a relationship with God. For us, it is great assurance that even though we may be rebelling, there is always hope and assurance of a reunification with God when we turn from our ways and seek his face.

New Testament Foundation – Luke 18:18-30

¹⁸A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

¹⁹"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. ²⁰You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'"^[1]

²¹"All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said.

²²When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

²³When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. ²⁴Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

²⁶Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?"

²⁷Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."

²⁸Peter said to him, "We have left all we had to follow you!"

²⁹"I tell you the truth," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God ³⁰will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life."

For the purpose of this work, this segment of the New Testament was chosen

because the characteristics of the rich young ruler (wealthy, position, power, influence) can easily be identified with the young people within our community. They have so much going for them that they rarely recognize a need for Jesus in their lives, and are reluctant (perhaps even unwilling) to give up any of their worldly accomplishments and possessions in order to be Christ's example.

The story of the rich young ruler is found in all three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 19:16-60, Mark 10:17-31). In all three accounts, this person is described as rich, but Matthew alone states that he was "young", and Luke alone states that he was a "ruler".

Luke places this story near the end of Jesus' journey into Jerusalem. This story follows two stories of Jesus that contrast a persistent widow and an unjust judge, a Pharisee and a tax collector, and welcoming children. Erdman suggests that the two short stories of Jesus receiving children and of Jesus interacting with a rich young ruler are strategically situated together to illustrate the kingdom. He says: "Both ancient and modern religious communities would typically be shocked that Jesus would invite infants to come enter the kingdom but say that the rich cannot enter."⁴³ In these accounts, Luke

⁴³ Dunn and Rogerson, *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*.

speaks about how true righteousness and humility allow one to gain entrance to God's kingdom. In Chapter 19, Luke then goes into the story of Zacheus, another rich man (although a tax collector and not a ruler), who faced the same choices, and made a far different decision.

This story is a dialogue between Jesus and a man who had approached him seeking guidance. The Greek word *eperōtaō* means "to ask a question". Sometimes it is used in the asking of questions in discussions, and it is clear by the use of this word that a discussion was about to take place—this was not a set up question on the part of the ruler, as some in the ruling class were known to do to Jesus. The man really wanted his question answered, as he was searching for something in his life that he did not already possess.⁴⁴

Who was this man who was asking the question? Jamieson says that this was a man of "irreproachable moral character"⁴⁵ who achieved this status even though he was a youth. Stein suggests that he was a ruler of the synagogue.⁴⁶ Marshall suggests that because of the Greek term ἄρχων (certain), this man may have been a member of the Sanhedrin or a leader of the synagogue.⁴⁷ The Greek word *archōn* is used here in a

⁴⁴ J. Reiling and J. L. Swellengrebel, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Luke*, Ubs Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 150.

⁴⁵ Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset, A.R. Fausset et al., "A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments," (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

⁴⁶ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary V. 24 (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1992), Accessed 10/1/2010.

⁴⁷ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke : A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter Eng.: Paternoster Press, 1978), 684.

general sense and denotes a person who belongs to the important and influential groups that have the ruling functions in society.⁴⁸ He was a man of importance and means.

The class system in Jesus' day was quite different than that which we would understand in today's world. Today we use terminology like "middle class" or "upper class", and it can be difficult to pinpoint a person in any particular class. However, that does not seem to be the case in Jesus' day. The class system was fairly well defined. The rich young ruler was probably a part of either the senators or the knights. Meeks says that, in this ancient society, an individual's rank would have been determined using many different factors including "power, occupation prestige, income or wealth, education and knowledge, religious and ritual purity, family and ethnic-group position, and local-community status."⁴⁹ This ruler seemed to have it all, and was therefore extremely important in his world.

In spite of all his riches, he found himself lacking something. He was willing to approach Jesus and ask him for what he knew he needed. In the Mark account, one finds the man "running" and even "kneeling before Him". (Mark 10:17). The fact that he was concerned about eternal life, according to the Pulpit Commentary, indicates that he was a Pharisee who "represented the noblest phase of this religious party".⁵⁰ Matthew Henry states that the man's willingness to approach Jesus was in direct contrast to the other

⁴⁸ Ibid., 604.

⁴⁹ Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians : The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 54.

⁵⁰ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, *The Pulpit Commentary* (New York, Toronto,: Funk & Wagnalls Company), 111.

rulers of which “few...had any esteem for Christ.”⁵¹ Yet the one thing the rich young ruler lacked was that he “had never realized his need of a Savior. Self-satisfied and self-contained, he honestly prided himself on his own goodness.”⁵²

This man refers to Jesus as “Good Teacher”. The word ‘good’ here means ‘kind,’ ‘beneficent,’ ‘generous’. He was probably not addressing Jesus’ abilities as a teacher of the law; neither does the term refer to the moral character of Jesus in the sense of ‘holy’ or something similar.⁵³ In the next verse (19) Jesus will repeat this phrase, but with a different meaning. This ruler addressed Jesus in a way that was unheard of for a Jew. “In all the religious Jewish literature there is no record of any Rabbi being addressed as ‘Good teacher.’ The Rabbis always said ‘there is nothing that is good but the law.’”⁵⁴ It is doubtful that this man was referring to Jesus as God, but rather using a term “good” in the sense of flattery.⁵⁵ In fact, the Pulpit Commentary goes so far as to say that if this young man had truly believed that Jesus was divine—that Jesus was God—he would never have refused the directive of Jesus to sell all he had and follow him.⁵⁶

He asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. The Greek word *klēronomeō*, meaning ‘to inherit’, is translated ‘to come into the possession of’. The

⁵¹ Henry, Church, and Peterman, Accessed 10/1/2010.

⁵² H.A Ironside, *Unless You Repent* (West Port Colborne, ON: Gospel Folio Press, 1994), 36.

⁵³ Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Mark*, Ubs Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 317.

⁵⁴ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, The Daily Study Bible Series. -- Rev. Ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 227.

⁵⁵ Bratcher and Nida, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Mark*, 317.

⁵⁶ Spence-Jones, 112.

concept of inheriting eternal life is seen in this culture as dependent upon what a person does.⁵⁷ One's actions, deeds and ability to follow the law were considered the way to gain salvation.

N.T. Wright says that this man was not speaking of "going to heaven" as we think about it when he was asking about inheriting eternal life. Rather, "eternal life meant the age to come, the time when God would bring heaven and earth together, the time when God's kingdom would come and his will be done on earth as in heaven."⁵⁸

Responding to the man's reference to Jesus as "good", Jesus asks the man if he knew what he was saying by using that term. As has already been suggested in the previous verse, this man was using the term not in a divine way, but rather as a term of flattery. Jesus, however, pounces on this terminology and uses the word "good" with a different meaning. In this verse, the meaning of the word "good" which Jesus uses (agathon) refers to moral perfection. He was perhaps referring to himself as divine. Walvood says that Jesus was implying that if He were truly good, then it is because "because He is God".⁵⁹ Jamieson refutes this idea because if only God were "good", that would be contrary to Scripture teaching, including his own as referenced in Ps. 112:5, Mt 25:21 and Tit 1:8.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Ibid., 417.

⁵⁸ N. T. Wright, *After You Believe : Why Christian Character Matters*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2010), 13.

⁵⁹ John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*, 2 vols. (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1983), 250.

⁶⁰ Jamieson. Accessed 10/1/2010

As soon as Jesus gets done addressing the term “good”, he then turns the focus on this young man following the commandments or the “law”. It is interesting that Jesus recites the commandments in the 2nd tablet (man’s relationship to man), and not man’s relationship to God. He specifically spells out the seventh, sixth, eighth, ninth and fifth commandments from Exodus 20. Jamieson suggests that Jesus “purposely confines Himself to the second table, which He would consider easy to keep.”⁶¹ By doing this, Barclay suggests that Jesus hoped to use this as a “crystallization of the commandments...if the rich ruler truly kept these commandments as he claimed, he would neither have needed to be told to sell all that he had and give to the poor nor have had difficulty obeying this command.”⁶² Marshall takes this a step further by saying that the implication of Jesus was that he was concerned about how this man was treating his fellow man. He says, “the question of love for God is not raised, possibly because nobody could claim to fulfill that commandment fully.”⁶³

In the Matthew account, the summary of the law is added, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” In Mark, the tenth commandment is added, “defraud not”. With reference to the Mark addition, Stein suggests that this is because this particular command is not found in Exodus 20:1-17.⁶⁴ The order of the commands varies slightly in Mark and Matthew in that the order of the first two commandments is reversed. However,

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Reiling and Swellengrebel, 630.

⁶³ Jamieson. Accessed 10/1/2010

⁶⁴ Stein, Accessed 10/1/2010.

Luke's order of the commandments is identical to the order found in Romans 13:9 and James 2:11 as well as the order of Exodus 20:13-15 in the LXX. Jamieson suggests that Luke is following an early church catechetical pattern of presenting the commandments.⁶⁵

Because of the religious leader's view of the law, it was probably correct that this young man had kept these commandments since childhood. *Youth* would imply approximately thirteen years of age, at which time Jewish boys were regarded as having reached the age of accountability and would then bear moral responsibility for their actions. Credibility is given to this line of thinking in that Jesus did not refute this man's statement. In Mark, we find that Jesus went a step further and "loved him".

Jesus now instructs this man to sell everything he owns to follow Jesus and obtain eternal life. For Walvoord, this was a test of the tenth commandment (which Jesus did not quote in Luke), probably because this was the one that the man did not keep.⁶⁶ Jamieson suggests that the riches were his idol, and he must give up his idol in order to gain what he asks.⁶⁷ Barclay says, "If a man's god is that to which he gives all his time, his thought, his energy, his devotion, then wealth was his god. If he was ever to find happiness he must be done with all that and live for others with the same intensity as that with which he had so long lived for himself."⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Walvoord, Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary., 252.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 253.

⁶⁸ Barclay, 81.

Charity was very important in Jewish culture. While teachers did not normally require a student/follower to totally get rid of everything he had, a few did. While some would give up what they had, “rich prospective disciples usually disappointed such radical teachers, failing the test of discipleship and returning to their wealth.”⁶⁹ In addition to selling everything he has (divesting himself of his idols), this man is issued a call to discipleship: “Come follow me.” The payoff for doing this would be that the ruler would have riches in heaven. Treasure in heaven is a synonym for eternal life and entering God’s kingdom.⁷⁰

This man’s reaction to this imperative was striking. Luke tells us that this man was sad because he was rich. Mark is more dramatic with describing this young man’s emotional response. This was not an easy choice for him...he was not like Esau, who quickly traded his birthright for a bowl of stew.⁷¹ Walvoord says that this ruler was “more attached to his wealth than to the idea of obtaining eternal life.”⁷² Jamieson says that he lacked “the one all-comprehensive requirement of the law—the absolute subjection of the heart to God.”⁷³ He did not want salvation on God’s terms, so he “turned and went away

⁶⁹ Craig S. Keener and InterVarsity Press., *The Iyp Bible Background Commentary : New Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Accessed 10/1/2010.

⁷⁰ Stein, Accessed 10/1/2010.

⁷¹ Richards, 669.

⁷² Walvoord, Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary., 252.

⁷³ Jamieson.

in great sorrow.”⁷⁴ Jesus’ commandment “reveals that the ruler was an idolater and loved his possessions more than God and his neighbor.”⁷⁵

An ancient document entitled “The Gospel of the Hebrews” recants a similar story. The Pulpit Commentary retells it this way: “Then the rich man began to scratch his head, for that was not to his mind. And the Lord said to him, How then can thou say, I have kept the Law; for it is written in the Law, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, and, lo! Many of thy brethren, children of Abraham, live in the gutter, and die of hunger, while thy table is loaded with good things, and nothing is sent out to them?”⁷⁶

Addressing the man who had just made a decision contrary to Jesus’ command, Jesus uses a hyperbole (a rhetorical exaggeration—a figure of speech often found in Jewish Wisdom literature) to illustrate his point. While he is not stating that being rich is a total impediment to obtaining salvation (as Abraham, David and Solomon were rich, but still attained salvation), he was suggesting that riches are a hindrance to one’s obtaining eternal life.⁷⁷

He then goes on to use a proverbial expression that describes literally a thing impossible, but figuratively a very difficult task. He uses the image of a camel (the largest animal in their knowledgebase) going through the eye of a needle. The term “eye of a needle” has a few different interpretations. The most common is that of a large

⁷⁴ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Victor, 2003), Accessed 10/1/2010.

⁷⁵ Stein, Accessed 10/1/2010.

⁷⁶ Spence-Jones, 112.

⁷⁷ Walvoord, Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary., 252.

animal going through the eye of a surgeon's needle (or perhaps a sewing needle).

Another interpretation was that it is said that beside the gate into Jerusalem through which traffic went there was a gate just wide and high enough for a person to get through, and that this gate was called the needle's eye. The word picture here is of a very large camel trying to get through that small gate. It is of note that Jerusalem in that time did have very low narrow entry doors/gates to prevent opposing armies from riding their animals into their areas, but there is no historic evidence that there was ever a gate named "Eye of a Needle". There is a rabbinic analogy that also speaks of an elephant going through the eye of a needle--this saying seems to have been in use later than Jesus' time. There is one final interpretation; that being that the Aramaic word for "camel" is translated "rope". While it is true that Jesus spoke Aramaic, there is no evidence to support that Jesus was mixing Greek/Hebrew words and or phrases in his discourse here.

Those who heard Jesus response were somewhat amazed. There was a thought in Jesus' day that those who were rich had found favor with God, and were blessed because of their obedience to God's commandments.⁷⁸ The effect of what Jesus was saying caught them off-guard. Keener says that Jesus had turned their "social order upside down", as the rich were often admired for their generosity as they had more to give than the poor who were often seen as less educated and less pious.⁷⁹ Under this thought process, if the ones whom God had blessed by giving them material richness could not enter the Kingdom of God, who then could?

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Keener and InterVarsity Press., Accessed 10/1/2010.

Jesus' answer then turns from his conversation with the rich young ruler, and using the term ἀκούσαντες, which is a term directed at the general audience, thus making the audience feel somewhat more at ease that there is potential for them...even if they do not have the worldly riches they thought signified God's blessing and favor upon them.⁸⁰

Stein poignantly points out two other Scriptures which point to this same saying, that what is impossible with man is possible with God.⁸¹ They both have to do with miraculous birth. The first, in Genesis 18:14, deals with Sarah's inability to have children. In this passage, we see Sarah laughing at God's promise that she will have a child, and God responding, "with God, all things are possible". We find the second instance in Luke 1:37 where Mary has just been told by the angel that she will carry the Son of God. Mary is bewildered, and the angel pronounces that "nothing is impossible with God."

In these words by Jesus that we find in Luke, Jesus is again dealing with new birth—the birth into the Kingdom of God. Marshall notes that it is impossible for a man to break free of his attachment to riches "even at the command of Jesus", but goes on to say that God can "work what is impossible".⁸²

The disciples remind Jesus that they had left everything behind to follow him. Robertson says that Peter was stating that everything included their homes, families and businesses. Keener notes that the disciples were not poor themselves (they had been tax collectors and fishermen; in order to be a fisherman in Jesus' day you had to have enough

⁸⁰ Marshall, 684.

⁸¹ Stein, Accessed 10/1/2010.

⁸² Marshall, 684.

money to purchase a boat—trees were rare, and the wood probably had to come from the cedars of Lebanon), but that the disciples left all of the security that their wealth provided to follow and serve Jesus.⁸³

Wiersbe latches on to Peter's comment as a "commercial view of discipleship."⁸⁴ He uses Peter's question from Matthew, where Peter says, "What then will there be for us?" (Matt. 19:27) Marshall doesn't see it quite the same way, noting that Jesus didn't rebuke Peter for misunderstanding what He had just said. Marshall says that Jesus' response "suggests that Peter's question was not regarded by the Evangelist as an implicit claim for a selfish reward," but rather used this as an opportunity to give a "promise that self-denial for the sake of the kingdom will be vindicated."⁸⁵

Stein notes that the "we" of Peter's statement may refer to all the disciples, but may, in fact, only pertain to Peter, James and John, referring back to Luke 5:10-11 where the trio was together with Jesus.

Jesus then acknowledges Peter's statement that the disciples had left everything. While Peter's comment was more general, Jesus became specific, mentioning relationships, as opposed to material wealth. With the term "wife", Marshall posits that divorce or separation (which Jesus does not support in other parts of the Scriptures), was not what he had in mind.⁸⁶ He says that the term *οἰκία* should refer to a household or family as opposed to a physical structure. As such, Marshall posits that the idea of

⁸³ Keener and InterVarsity Press., Accessed 10/1/2010.

⁸⁴ Wiersbe, Accessed 10/1/2010.

⁸⁵ Marshall, 684.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

“material loss and reward is not present in Luke, possibly because he wished to avoid the idea of material reward for the disciples.”⁸⁷

Here, Jesus speaks of reward in this life and the next. The next life clearly refers to salvation, and many believe that the rewards in this life refer to the community of believers found in Acts 2, where the believers shared their possessions in this world⁸⁸ through a “closely knit family”.⁸⁹ Henry states that the rewards in this world will be manifest in the “graces and comforts of God’s Spirit, in the pleasures of communion with God and of a good conscience.”⁹⁰

Jamieson notes that in Matthew’s rendering of this same story, there is a special eternal reward for the twelve in that they will reign with Jesus and judge the twelve tribes of Israel.⁹¹ However, Mark also adds that this reward would be accompanied by persecution.

For us, the question becomes: “Is a relationship with Jesus, and the resulting community of faith which accompanies such a relationship, worth giving up what the world values as important?” Such is the challenge before those who minister to youth and desire to see transformation happen in their lives.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Keener and InterVarsity Press., Accessed 10/1/2010.

⁸⁹ Walvoord, Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary., 252.

⁹⁰ Henry, Church, and Peterman, Accessed 10/1/2010.

⁹¹ Jamieson.

Historical Foundation

In order to gain a handle on this project, it is important to know the history of what others have tried and accomplished in this field.

Perhaps the earliest ministry to youth can be traced back to the apostolic church where the primary responsibility of the apostles was to educate those who had converted and had wanted to be baptized. This was known as Catechumen.⁹² In the second century, a catechetical manual for this purpose entitled the “Didache” or “The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles” was created. By the end of the second century, a school known as the Alexandrian catechetical school became very influential in the development of Christian education.⁹³ This process of Christian education morphed and developed to include doctrinal, moral, reading and writing instruction.

Since that time, records of ministry to youth are relatively new, with documentation beginning in the late eighteenth century. It is only in the nineteenth century that substantive history is recorded. It may be said that social norms and familial structures remained relatively stable during the early years of history, with the family being the center of existence for most people, and thus ministry to youth happened primarily (or perhaps only) within the family structure. It was only when society and the economic engines shifted drastically in the world, did a need and desire for ministry specifically to youth that occurred outside the home arise. It is within the context of

⁹² James Reed and Ronnie Prevost, *A History of Christian Education* (Nashville: Broadman, 1993.), 69-70.

⁹³ Kenda Creasy Dean, Chap Clark, and Dave Rahn, *Starting Right : Thinking Theologically About Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Youth Specialties/Zondervan Pub. House, 2001), 78.

social and economic change which started happening in England and the United States during the Industrial Revolution that we find the development and implementation of substantive ministry to youth.

Youth Ministry pre-United States

Youth ministry began during the Industrial Revolution in England during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The economic changes that profoundly reshaped the world as it was known, and reordered the social fabric of our nation, happened in England before it hit the United States. What was an agricultural based society now shifted as the need for skilled labor increased. People moved into the metropolitan areas. The need for labor was so intense that children and youth were needed as workers. The jobs moved from rural areas to the cities...and the people moved with them. The first real attempt at youth ministry came as a result of a man named Robert Raikes who was concerned with the state of young children working long days in the factories. His movement became known as the Sunday School movement. The primary goal of this effort was to teach young people how to read and how to behave appropriately. He used the Bible as the textbook.

As time went on, people became concerned about how young adults who had left their families were being influenced by city life which was ravaged by crime, poor housing sexual immorality and other “vices” once considered off-limits to young people. Out of this concern, George Williams (a dry goods merchant) established the Young Men’s Christian Association, which began as a Bible study for his apprentices, clerks and other male assistants. At this time, the YMCA was distinctively Christian in nature and

purpose, and was instrumental in the spiritual formation of young people in both England and the United States. The purpose of the YMCA was to “help Christian young people retain their Christian commitments after they had moved into the urban jungles where jobs were available.”⁹⁴

History of Youth Ministry in the United States

The settling of America at its birth created a melting pot of divergent people with equally divergent spiritual backgrounds. Anglicans tended to settle in South Carolina, Puritans in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, the Dutch Reformed Church in Amsterdam (now New York), French Huguenots in the Southern colonies, German Lutherans in the Midwest, English Quakers in the mid-Atlantic colonies and English Wesleyans up and down the East Coast. Many came to America to escape religious persecution and gain religious freedom.

In the Colonial period and the period of the Early Republic (1600-1840), the early settlers found that this freedom was not as welcome as they had thought it would be. They found that spiritual freedom created apathy.⁹⁵ Life was very difficult for these early settlers. Young people were required, at about the age of seven, to work in the fields (and later the factories) to sustain their family life. After hours in the fields, there was little time or energy to focus on spiritual well-being, let alone age-specific care for young people. It was the role of the family, not the corporate church, to care for and nurture the spiritual lives of their children.

⁹⁴ Charles Howard Hopkins, *History of the Ymca in North America* (New York: Associated Press, 1951), 12.

⁹⁵ Mark Senter, *When God Shows Up : A History of Protestant Youth Ministry in America*, Youth, Family, and Culture Series (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2010), 5.

Once they hit the age at which they could work in the fields or shops, they were considered adults. There was no youth, per se. Youth then would have been defined as a period between the time they were able to work until the late twenties or early thirties. Youth were simply identified as those who had not worked long enough to provide for themselves or a family (for boys), and the girls were identified as youth if they had not yet married or started families. It was only in the middle of the nineteenth century that society started looking at young people through different lenses. The word ‘adolescents’ came into the vocabulary of American thought process with G. Stanley Hall’s book, *Adolescence*, in 1904. In his book, Hall “concluded that the adolescent years produced the most concentrated period of religious conversions in life.”⁹⁶ This was the period in their lives that they were most responsive to a call to new birth and discipleship. He was the first to proclaim (and many have affirmed) that the majority of Christian conversions took place during the years of adolescence.⁹⁷

It was in this time period that the Industrial Revolution in the United States occurred, and the settling of the west began to happen. People started to migrate to the cities in search of economic prosperity, and immigrants (primarily from Europe) numbering around five million flocked to America between the War of 1812 and the Civil War. The middle class was created. It was during this time that the public school system emerged, and society began looking at youth as something other than either a child or an adult.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 44.

⁹⁷ G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence* (New York,: D. Appleton and company, 1904), 282-283.

During the Great Depression and World War II, the word “teenager” came into existence, and an identifiable culture of youth ministry began in earnest.

Prior to the early 1800’s, the emphasis of youth training was on living a lifestyle that was distinctively Christian based. In this period of history, Cotton Mather (a Pietist) was one of the first people to focus on spirituality in young people. Mather was a member of a religious society when he was eighteen and as a result, he strongly advocated for others to become involved in ministry to young people. The primary purpose of these groups was to elicit personal piety and worship of God. It was also during this period of time that the Great Awakening occurred in 1734 in Northampton, Massachusetts. The Great Awakening was a revival that happened as a result of a tragedy that struck Northampton in which two young people died within a very short time of each other. Jonathan Edwards seized upon this opportunity to preach piety and sexual purity and denounce other vices of the youth culture of the day. The Second Great Awakening (1790-1840), led by Timothy Dwight (the grandson of Jonathan Edwards) focused on an intimate, personal relationship with God—feelings were now advocated as part of a spiritual experience—in addition to biblical knowledge and a strict obedience to Christian behavior expectations.

This was followed by the Sunday school era. Advanced by Robert Raikes in 1780 in Great Britain, this movement focused on reading and social skills. They read the Bible, sang some hymns, and even learned about personal manners and hygiene. The first Sunday schools in America were introduced and patterned after Raikes model around 1785. This movement gained steam, and in 1830, the American Sunday School Union

had the mission of establishing a Sunday school in “every desolate place” throughout the Mississippi Valley to bring “every child and youth under the influence of the gospel.”⁹⁸

Senter identifies three distinct cycles of ministry to youth from the beginning emphasis in the 1800’s through the end of the third cycle in 1989. These cyclical patterns came about as a response to changes in the American culture and society, often fueled by significant economic changes. Senter identifies the first cycle as occurring between 1824 and 1875, and characterizes this cycle as the establishment and identification with youth societies such as the YMCA, protestant juvenile temperance societies and Sunday school associations which focused on “young people’s outward lifestyle and a sanctified way of living,”⁹⁹ which had previously been the domain of spiritual awakenings and revival experiences. The second cycle, dated 1881-1925, was characterized by an emphasis on cognitive learning of Biblical content and denominational doctrine with the intended purpose of “bringing about a lifestyle in harmony with the values of the sponsoring society.”¹⁰⁰ While still under the umbrella society organizations, the method was changed to an educational/school model. The emphasis was on biblical instruction; the expected results were that the young people would live up to the norms and expectations of their own church. The third cycle was dated between 1933 and 1989, and was characterized by a relational model of ministry. It is in this cycle that the parachurch organizations came into prominence, and fellowship became the dominating focus in ministry to youth. Senter further states that we are in a fourth cycle of youth ministry today that began in the

⁹⁸ Senter, 56.

⁹⁹ Ibid., xii.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., xiii.

1990's. Defining the current cycle is proving elusive due to the fact that society is now a pluralistic culture that values religious tolerance.

Within the context of the first cycle, one of the beginning movements was known as the Juvenile Temperance Societies. These societies focused on the health of a young person's moral well being. These societies were identified with commitment or pledge cards (a tool of ministry that was to remain for a significant amount of time). Their primary function was to get young people to give up vices that the leadership considered immoral (tobacco, gambling, smoking, etc.)

Ministry to youth began in earnest with Theodore L. Cuyler who was pastor of Market Street Church in New York. At this time, many opportunities were afforded to young people with things like temperance, literary, singing, missionary societies and baseball clubs. Instead of providing "Christian" versions of these clubs, Cuyler instead enlisted young people in a call to prayer. He established coeducational prayer meetings for young people, and experienced much success in this venture. In 1860, Cuyler took a new pastorate at Lafayette Avenue Church in Brooklyn and once again started youth prayer meetings; it was in this environment that things really took off. Because there was so much interest and participation in these prayer meetings, a new organization was formed known as the Young People's Association. The purpose of this group was the "conversion of souls, the development of Christian character, and the training of new converts in religious work."¹⁰¹ While not the primary purpose of this group, they did not neglect the young people's need for social interaction. There was a half hour fellowship

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 136.

period at the end of each weekly meeting, and a committee was charged with creating a monthly gathering that consisted of such things as music, readings, lectures, artistic presentations and other activities that would appeal to young people.

Cuyler also published articles on his own ministry. This caught the eye of a pastor in Portland, Maine by the name of Francis E. Clark. It was through this pastor in the 1880's that the Christian Endeavor Society was birthed. Clark initially focused his ministry to young people on the revival mode (large meetings calling for conversion). He found himself becoming disturbed that these revivals, while accomplishing much to gain initial conversion on the part of young people, left something to be desired in the follow through of these young people. Jonathan Edwards also noticed the lack of follow through on converts experienced in the Great Awakening. Clark was intent on doing something to change this phenomenon. Clark created the Christian Endeavor to "promote an earnest Christian life among its members to increase their mutual acquaintance, and to make them more useful in the service of God."¹⁰² The cornerstone of his ministry was accountability.¹⁰³ Not only were the young people required to commit to attendance at meetings, they were also required to give account of their spiritual progress to the group, and to assume a role of leadership within the Christian Endeavor movement. A century later, some vestiges of the Christian Endeavor movement remained active. Senter identifies six reasons: 1) the Pledge – a commitment to live out the ideals of the Endeavor; 2) weekly prayer meeting; 3) regular committee work (ministry to others); 4)

¹⁰² Ibid., 144.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 12.

daily prayer and Bible reading; 5) denominational loyalty; and 6) interdenominational in scope.¹⁰⁴ As important as revival ministry was to conversion, continued participation in committees provided nurture for the new Christians. A new form of ministry to young people was birthed.

The second period of youth ministry was the period of Youth Societies. Growing support and energy around Clark's ideas and model for ministry, along with a growing middle class America provided a prime opportunity for ministry to young people.

With the changing culture in America, the rise of the middle class, and the prominence of public education, came a change in how youth ministry functioned. The church was no longer the center of people's lives, and the church began to compete for young people's time and allegiance. The school setting had become the focus of young people's daily lives; the church, Christian Societies and organizations such as the YMCA and YWCA began to become marginalized and much less effective. Thus, the third wave of youth ministry was ushered in. Churches no longer relied on volunteers to work with youth. The era of paid professionals had begun, along with the influence of the parachurch organizations. The new way of doing ministry revolved around relationships. The rigidity of Youth Societies gave way to the Youth Fellowship movement.

Youth Fellowship was created to encourage fellowship with God and peers, and used Luke 2:52 as its theological grounding which talks about Jesus "growing in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and people". The focus switched from the accountability forms of the Christian Endeavor movement to reflect the societal norms of peer groups,

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 163-164.

especially within the school setting. Almost all the denominations in existence adopted this model of ministry by the mid 1940's. The first church to adopt this model was the Congregational Christian Church in 1936 with the formation on the "Pilgrim Fellowship". In 1934, a conference was held entitled "Christian Youth Building a New World" which was sponsored by the Federal Council of Churches. Out of this conference came the United Christian Youth Movement, and this conference identified five emphases for youth fellowship in the local church: 1) Christian faith; 2) Christian witness; 3) Christian outreach; 4) Christian citizenship; and 5) Christian fellowship.¹⁰⁵ These youth fellowships had narrowed the definition of youth (initially between the age of twelve and twenty-four), and broke the age groups down into smaller groups. Other ministries within the church sprang out of this movement to augment the Youth Fellowships with such things as choirs, camping, service projects, and scouting organizations. The control of Youth Fellowship remained primarily within the local church.

The third wave of ministry had great appeal to the everyday youth of society. The late fifties to the late sixties were the heydays of the parachurch ministry in America. These ministries came as a direct result of a social change in the youth fabric of America. One of the largest contributors to this social change was the secularization of America, with one of the prime causes being the Supreme Court decision of *McCormack vs. Board of Education* that ruled the teaching of the Bible and other religious topics during the school day unconstitutional. Organizations, such as the YMCA (once boasting more than a

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 200.

million converts in a two year period from 1857-1859)¹⁰⁶, that traditionally focused on spiritual issues began to shift their focus to more of a social outreach. Because the youth were spending more time away from the home (the traditional place of Christian instruction), and at the same time religious aspects were systematically removed from the places youth did congregate (such as school and the YMCA/YWCA), a huge void existed in the spiritual health of young people. The parachurch organizations stepped in to fill the void, beginning with Youth For Christ and followed shortly thereafter by the Miracle Book Club, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship and Young Life.

Youth For Christ was organized in 1944 out of a conference in Winona Lake, Indiana and enlisted a young Billy Graham as its first full-time staff person. The purpose of YFC was to have young people witness through conversations and moral examples displayed in the Christian Faith.¹⁰⁷ Graham focused his messages on conversion, with a message that was direct and to the point. “Your choice can be one of two decisions—accept Christ and believe Him, or die without Him and suffer judgment at the Great White Throne of Judgment.”¹⁰⁸

Young Life, still very much active in our present day, changed the way youth ministry was done. They were not connected with any particular denomination, and they concentrated only on high school students, with the sole intention of “winning

¹⁰⁶ Hopkins, 81.

¹⁰⁷ Jon Pahl, *Youth Ministry in Modern America : 1930 to the Present* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 56.

¹⁰⁸ Billy Graham and Joel A. Carpenter, *The Early Billy Graham : Sermon and Revival Accounts, Fundamentalism in American Religion, 1880-1950* 44 (New York: Garland Pub., 1988), 61.

uncommitted high school students to a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.”¹⁰⁹ Their philosophy of ministry focused on attaining the ‘right to be heard’ among unchurched high school students. They befriended them, met with them on their own turf (thus incarnational ministry), and gained their trust. They started camps that were of high quality and intensity, thereby removing the youth from their own familiar settings. The youth were treated to all the bells and whistles Young Life could muster, and were presented with the Gospel at the same time.

During the 1960’s, the biggest change affecting adolescents was the shift in focus for adult systems and institutions. As society began to change, adults found themselves trying to find a safe place, a haven of security and rest. With adults scrambling to take care of their own survival needs, the young people found themselves without an identity (which used to rest in their families of origins). Clark says that this was the hallmark of the adolescent culture in the 1960’s.¹¹⁰

Currently in its fourth identifiable cycle, youth ministry is constantly changing, as is society. The lines of acceptable religious doctrines are blurred. What was strictly taboo in religious teaching is now being questioned. Inerrancy of Scripture is being challenged. Lifestyle of choice is becoming more important than biblical mandates of holy living. The challenge for today’s youth ministry is to teach our young people holy living in a culture that is anything but holy.

¹⁰⁹ Senter, 219.

¹¹⁰ Clark, 32-33.

Pahl describes the economic growth of the nation from the New Deal to the Regan Revolution as foundational to the shift of youth ministry from one whose focus was on purity and holy living to a ministry style that emphasizes practices that tailor “ecclesiastical products to consumer demands in their particular niche.”¹¹¹ Youth ministry must now compete with every other offering of society. The church is not usually the center of young people’s lives, and if the church wants to remain relevant to young people, it must reinvent itself.

History of Youth Ministry in the Wesleyan/Methodist traditions

The earliest record of ministry to young people in Methodism was the organization of the Church Lyceum (lyceum being a type of educational school) in 1872 at the Fifty-first Street Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. This group focused on the reading and discussing of approved books by youth. This effort did not last long, as it did not seem to meet the needs of the young people participating.

In 1883 a Methodist group was formed for young people called the Young People’s Methodist Alliance. This was the result of a camp meeting near Chicago, Illinois where the preaching focused on the Wesleyan doctrine of complete sanctification. As a result of this preaching, many young people wanted to live into their baptism in the Holy Spirit, and covenanted together to keep alive their experiences. They brought back the Wesleyan concept of class meetings and the signing of pledges. After two years, this group founded the Alliance Herald, a newspaper that communicated and promoted their activities. By 1889, 410 local societies joined this movement. Also In 1883, a Methodist Episcopal

¹¹¹ Pahl, 119.

Young People's Union was created combining several young people's societies in various Methodist congregations in Brooklyn.

The focus of youth societies in late 1800's to early 1900's focused on holy living and evangelizing. Methodist youth pledged:

I enjoy or will seek the blessing of heart purity as taught in the Scriptures. I promise to abstain from the use of tobacco and of all intoxicants as beverages, to refrain from card-playing and dancing, and from attending the theatre, the opera, the circus, and all other questionable places of amusement. I agree to have stated seasons of private prayer, to pray for my pastor and for the members of the Young People's Methodist Alliance, to study the Bible each day, and to give thought to winning souls, by personal conversation, letter writing, tract distribution, prayer and other means.¹¹²

In 1984, another Methodist youth society was formed called the Oxford League. Organized by the chairman of the International Lesson Committee of the Sunday School Union, he saw the value of the Lyceum, but wanted to add a spiritual dimension to the educational aspect of the group.

In 1864, the Young People's Christian league was formed, and was officially sanctioned by General Conference (the governing board of the Methodist church). It was an umbrella organization of the local church's young people societies. They held regional meetings that enabled the groups to come together and share ideas. The Young People's Christian league emerged from this endeavor with the intention of unifying all the existing societies, Lyceums, guilds and bands. It allowed the local groups to retain their individual identities, while providing encouragement and a sense of connection to a larger calling for those local organizations. It lasted only a year, at which time the

¹¹² Senter, 60.

denominational group, the Epworth League, was birthed. A similar movement was also flourishing in Detroit known as the Methodist Young People's Union, which was also replaced by the Epworth League.

In 1889, the Epworth League was formed as a merger of five district Methodist societies in Cleveland, Ohio. Divided into age appropriate divisions (Middle ages ten to twelve, Intermediate ages thirteen to seventeen and the Senior League from eighteen to thirty). On one Saturday evening a month, they held a social with the express purpose of providing young people a social experience in a healthy environment. The primary focus of the Epworth League was missional in nature. Educational programs stressed missions on a national and international level. This league gave voice to the moral issues of the day such as lynching's occurring in the south and orphanages. Charity work was highlighted, and money was raised for these purposes. The normal meeting times were Sunday evenings, and lasted for fifty years until the merger of the various Methodist bodies into the Methodist Church at which time a change was made from the Epworth League format to Methodist Youth Societies.

The youth movement began having increasing influence within Methodism. In 1926, four thousand young people met in Memphis for the Methodist Young People's Convention. They demanded the "continuation of efforts for unification of Methodist denominations,"¹¹³ and carried significant influence in the eventual uniting of various brands of Methodism under a single banner.

¹¹³ Frederick Abbott Norwood, *Sourcebook of American Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 365.

The Methodist Youth Society was formed at a Watch Night (December 31) service in 1941. Because World War II had begun, the demographics of ministry to youth had changed. No longer were the young people involved through their twenties, as they were either off to war or supporting the war movement. The focus of youth ministry now was upon the school age young people. The merger of the denomination also merged two primary youth ministry formats--those of the Epworth League and the Christian Endeavor movement. The Methodist Youth Fellowship provided a new beginning and a new identity, and created a new loyalty for the merged Methodist denomination. The focus was on fellowship for the young people and denominational allegiance. Gone was the emphasis on holy living. The MYF reflected societal influences and offered extracurricular activities as part of its main offerings; evangelism was not in the equation. This ministry peaked in 1961 (claiming 1.2 million members), and then began a long period of decline.

The current stage of youth ministry (which is defined more clearly in the second chapter of this work) finds us in a time when the social fabric and economic climate is rapidly changing, probably at a pace faster than at any other time in history. Young people are questioning everything; the economy has entered a recession, foreclosures of homes are at an all time high, and needs of young people are changing along with everything else. History of youth ministry continues to evolve, as the church and various organizations seek to minister effectively to young people who do not value a relationship with Jesus as important as generations past once did.

Theological Foundation

Theology enables us to understand our faith. All theology should be more than mere words, thoughts and ideas and speculation; theology that is “meshed into life as it ought to be...is as practical as the next breath we are to breathe.”¹¹⁴ While there are many facets and branches of theology (such as liberation, feminist, Baptist, etc.) all forms of theology should have practical applications. There is, however, a genre of theology known simply as Practical Theology, upon which this project is based.

Practical Theology

The theological root of this paper is based upon practical theology. Practical theology moves us to live our lives in light of God’s reconciling work in the world through Jesus. Wesley was himself a practical theologian. He believed that all theology should be brought down to a personal level where one could live out one’s theology resulting in changed lives. Wesley’s way of ‘doing theology’ had its emphasis on both mission and praxis.¹¹⁵

As human beings, we participate in the ongoing and continually unfolding historical narrative of God. Swinton and Mowatt define practical theology thus: “Practical theology is critical, theological reflection on the practices of the church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful

¹¹⁴ J. Kenneth Grider, *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press, 1994), 19.

¹¹⁵ Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley : Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 1.

participation in God's redemptive practices in, to and for the world."¹¹⁶ The effect of this type of theology can be summed up as such: "Practical theology locates itself within the diversity of human experience, making its home in the complex web of relationships and experiences that form the fabric of all that we know."¹¹⁷ Practical theology is not simply a theory; it is a lived out experience of what one believes.

"Practical theology is understood not primarily as a branch of theological knowledge, but rather as offering us a way of doing theology and being theologians."¹¹⁸ Practical theology is distinct from other theological ways of analyzing our understanding of God in that "its beginning point is within human experience."¹¹⁹ Further defining what practical theology means, Alastair Campbell defines it this way: "Practical theology juxtaposes concrete situations of witness, celebration and service with the findings and formulations of the biblical, historical and philosophical subjects in the theological corpus."¹²⁰ Practical theology seeks to allow people to make radical changes in their lives and way of living through their interaction with, and understanding of, the Scriptures. Without the ability to live out one's own theology in a practical way, our

¹¹⁶ John Swinton and Harriet Mowatt, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM, 2006), 6.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹⁸ Charles W. Carter, R. Duane Thompson, and Charles R. Wilson, *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology : Biblical, Systematic, and Practical*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Francis Asbury Press, 1983), 131.

¹¹⁹ Swinton and Mowatt, 5.

¹²⁰ James Woodward, Stephen Pattison, and John Patton, *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology* (Oxford, UK ; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 84.

religion is “lacking in ethical depth, devotional power, and healthy discipline.”¹²¹

Practical theology “generally asserts that the Gospel is primarily about the kingdom of God that has come and is yet to come,”¹²² and should be “understood as that aspect of the theological enterprise that focuses on the interpretation of the practices of the church and world as an ongoing source of theological interpretation and understanding.”¹²³ Through practical theology, we seek to implement our faith; for the practical theologian, the Gospel is “not simply something to be believed, but also something to be lived.”¹²⁴ The starting point for practical theology is God and the revelation that God has given to us through his Son, Jesus Christ. We practice our theology as a response to God’s ongoing action in the world (and our understanding of his past actions), and from our human experience as a result of our responding in this manner. Practical theology “takes seriously the idea of performing the faith and seeks to explore the nature and in particular the faithfulness of that performance.”¹²⁵ “In America,” Udo Middlemann asserts, “for many Christians the intensity of their commitment is more decisive than its content. Moved away from the position of shaping the culture, Christians have become a subculture in the market of numerous personal ideologies.”¹²⁶ Practical theology seeks to

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Mark Senter, *Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church : Inclusive Congregational, Preparatory, Missional, Strategic* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Youth Specialties, 2001), 5.

¹²³ Swinton and Mowatt, 13.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 5.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 4.

¹²⁶ Udo W. Middlemann, *The Market Driven Church* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 47-48.

live out one's faith in such a way as it does shape culture and changes personal ideologies.

Wesleyan Model of Practical Theology

Wesley had a four-point process of theological understanding: Scripture, reason, tradition and experience. Methodists know this as the quadrilateral.

This quadrilateral emphasizes the importance of practical theology in the Wesleyan tradition. Wesley seems to use the words "experimental divinity" and "practical divinity" almost interchangeably in his writings.¹²⁷ Such experimental or practical divinity verifies the truth of Scripture in and through the community of believers. For Wesley, "the truth of Scripture must be actualized and operationalized in increasing Christ-likeness in both personal life and in the broader community."¹²⁸

The quadrilateral method of practical theology is the proclaiming and living the authority of Scripture as understood in the light of reason, tradition and experience. The method's primary appeal is first and foremost to Scripture, and secondarily to reason, tradition and experience. Wesleyans hold that one should "believe neither more nor less than what is manifestly contained in, and provable by, the Holy Scriptures".¹²⁹ The quadrilateral method of interpretation puts some flesh on how we determine what is "manifestly contained in and provable by" Scripture.

¹²⁷ Collins, 2.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ John Wesley and Albert Cook Outler, *The Works of John Wesley*, The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), Volume 3, 496.

While Scripture is truly inspired by the Holy Spirit, we understand that God has used humans as the vehicle by which the revelation of Scripture is revealed to humanity. Therefore, we understand that we must look at Scripture in the light of the human agency involved in the revelation, and interpret accordingly. We believe that while all Scripture is indeed God-breathed (2 Tim 3:16), we also hold that God “continually inspires, supernaturally assists, those that read it with earnest prayer”.¹³⁰ In other words, Scripture is the inspired and illumined Word of God.

We hold that we must look for the plain, literal meaning of any text of Scripture, and read it within the context of Scripture itself (Scripture proving Scripture). When interpreting Scripture that seems to contradict itself, or seems to be obscure, we interpret the obscure text by those “which speak more plainly.”¹³¹ When interpreting any particular passage, it is to be interpreted within the context of Scripture as a whole. For example, when interpreting the Old Testament, we do so in light of the Old Testament Scriptures, promises, covenants, etc., having been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

The work of the Holy Spirit in one’s understanding of Scripture must not be under emphasized. Wesley held that the same Spirit that inspired the original authors of these texts will inspire one’s reading and interpretation of Scripture. An assumption is made that the same Spirit that was at work in the original revelation of Scripture is at work in one’s current interpretation of Scripture. This theory of the Spirit’s ongoing work

¹³⁰ John Wesley and John Lawson, *Selections from John Wesley's Notes on the New Testament* (Chicago: A. R. Allenson, 1955), 794.

¹³¹ Wesley and Outler, *The Works of John Wesley*, Volume 3, 179.

throughout history is where the quadrilateral method of interpretation obtains its authenticity and authority.

After Scripture, the first emphasis in the quadrilateral is *reason*. God made us different from all other creation, in that he gave us the ability to have emotion, to think logically, to reason. Isaiah 1:18 says, “Come, let us reason together”. God has given us a unique ability to comprehend, organize and make judgments upon things that we see, hear, and experience. Reasoning helps develop understanding. Understanding helps us to internalize and interpret Scripture.

Because reason is both a left brain and a right brain function, one must be careful to utilize reason within the context of community. Within the community of faith, we diminish the risk of becoming “too rational”, putting too much faith in our own ability to reason, and we also diminish the risk of becoming too emotional and failing to let faith become a real part of our equation. Faith cannot be hampered by reason; in fact, our faith propels us to find the best reasons to explain our faith.

Next in the quadrilateral equation is *tradition*. As mentioned before, a complete understanding of the Spirit’s work in interpreting Scripture cannot be held apart from understanding how that work has transpired through history. Much of our understanding of Scripture, and our practice of the Christian faith, come from our understanding of the Patristic Fathers of the Church. People such as Ignatius, Polycarp, Origen, Chrysostom, Basil, Alexander and many others help us to interpret Scripture.

One of the reasons these people are so important is in the way that they interpreted Scripture. Instead of picking the scriptures apart piece by piece and analyzing

each piece on its own merit, the patristic method was to look at the Bible as a whole, to be able to provide an interpretation of scripture based upon all the parts weaving together into an overarching theme. Their overarching theory under which they operated was that the “coming of Jesus as the Messiah or Christ provided them with the basis for formulating a total reading or general theory of scripture”.¹³² For them, “Jesus Christ is the key to uncovering the real meaning of scripture”. Since our own goal in interpreting Scripture is to do so in the special revelation of Jesus Christ as fulfillment of all Scripture, any interpretation of Scripture outside of our Patristic Fathers would be incomplete at best, and at its worst allow us to falsely interpret based upon our own emotions and narrow personal agendas. We would do well to follow in the footsteps of their methods of interpretation.

One of the best evangelical tools known to us today is to be able to say of God, “I have found this to be true in my life”. We test the Scriptures based upon our experience. If we follow God’s commands, do the blessings come forth? Do we see God’s hand at work fulfilling the Scriptures in those around us? Have we experienced the pain and suffering that comes with sin, as the Bible clearly articulates? Then we can rely upon our own *experience* in interpreting Scriptures. For Wesley, the “experience” that changed his life was his Aldersgate experience where his heart was “strangely warmed” by his experience of his own assurance of salvation. It was here that “Wesley witnessed in his own experience the truth of Christian doctrine: ‘I now am assured that these things are so:

¹³² John J. O’Keefe and Russell R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision : An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 25.

I experience them in my own breast.”¹³³ Wesley judged the validity of biblical and religious claims by experience, not experience by doctrine or theology.¹³⁴

We are born with two types of senses; the first being natural and the second being spiritual. Spiritual senses can perhaps also be identified as a conscience, our ability to determine the difference between good and evil or right versus wrong. When we experience a new birth in Christ, something happens to us whereby we are able to understand things in a new light. It empowers a change in our hearts. Article XVII of the Methodist 39 Articles of Faith (doctrinal standards) says that the “Godly person feels in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh...and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things”.¹³⁵ The apostles, in trying to discern what to do said “it seems good to us and the Holy Spirit” (Acts 15:28). Emotion plays a role in our interpretation of Scripture. These “feelings” may be called private revelation, but must always be measured against Scripture to ascertain their validity.

Theology Specific to Ministry to Youth

Youth ministry practices practical theology in that young people try to “discover God’s truth in and through Christian life.”¹³⁶ Practical theology in youth ministry seeks to put into action what we confess. We seek to help youth better understand how God is

¹³³ Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity : A Plain Exposition of His Teaching on Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), 84.

¹³⁴ Grider, 29.

¹³⁵ United Methodist Church (U.S.), *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, Tenn.: United Methodist Pub. House, 2004), 65-66.

¹³⁶ Dean, Clark, and Rahn, *Starting Right : Thinking Theologically About Youth Ministry*, 31.

present in their lives--how God is active in their actions, so that we might be partners with God in bringing his Kingdom into the present reality in the lives of our young people and into the world around them.

A theology rooted in our relationship with others “helps us see the importance of particularized people—the people who stand tall, yes, but also the little people, the almost unpeople whom God made so many of. It helps us see that there are not simply so many souls around us but so many body-soul complexes—persons.”¹³⁷ When we practice a theology of relationships, we see that God is present in all people, and we are God’s vessels to point others to Christ.

Kenda Creasy Dean says that adolescents engage in theology every day. They may not be conscious of the fact that they are thinking theologically, but they are. She calls it “intuitive theology”.¹³⁸ She gives some examples, such as how youth treat others has them practicing a doctrine of creation, or sacrificing for others being an act of faith—both examples of intuitive theology. She also posits that youth who are (or have been) part of faith communities practice “embedded theology”—the theology inherited through their faith experience shapes who they are and how they think. Finally, she describes a deliberate theology—one where young people truly examine the assumptions and practices of their faith.¹³⁹ Especially in today’s postmodern culture where young people

¹³⁷ Grider, 20.

¹³⁸ Dean, Clark, and Rahn, *Starting Right : Thinking Theologically About Youth Ministry*, 29.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 30.

question everything, the church is in a unique position to help our youth understand themselves and their relationship with God and others within a theological rubric.

Practical theology does not work apart from other forms of theology, such as historical, critical, feminist or any other number of theological disciplines, but rather practical theology is *informed* by these other forms but goes beyond them. We take all the information that we have at our disposal (philosophical, developmental, sociological—as well as our knowledge of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit and our understanding of how God has worked throughout history), and we seek to understand, reflect and evaluate any particular situation and respond in such a way that moves us into a closer relationship with God by acting on his behalf out of our relationship with him.

Many youth (if not most) will profess to knowing Jesus, perhaps even being saved. But what happens after one becomes assured of salvation and has not yet entered into that future time of permanent dwelling with Jesus in the after-life? Practical theology demands that we live into that salvation; there is a need for transformation. We use our understanding of God, and our understanding of the redeeming work that Christ did for us on the cross, and we seek to live our lives accordingly. We practice our beliefs until they become part of us. We are called to be “genuine, image-bearing, God-reflecting human beings.”¹⁴⁰ It is through ‘doing’ our theology that our hearts are transformed from having hearts of stone to being given a heart of flesh (Ezek. 36:26). Youth are in need of a heart transplant, as their hearts are often spiritually dead.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Wright, 71.

¹⁴¹ David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 197.

It seems to this author that there are two types of practical theology that override all aspects of youth ministry, specifically as it relates to this particular project. The first is a theology of *relationships*, with the second being a theology of *holy living*.

Young people thrive in relationships. They crave relationships, and they will find them wherever they can. "For teenagers, friendship is anything but expendable. Teenagers treat friendship as holy ground, a sacred trust not to be broached by church, parents or personal ambition."¹⁴² Relationships are the center of a young person's existence, and the church can help satisfy that need for relationship in several ways, the most crucial being a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Many do not realize that they were created with a need for relationships, especially a relationship with the living God. Without a relationship with God, they can chase all the other relationships that they want, but still will not feel fulfilled until that God-sized hole in their heart is filled with a relationship with Jesus. DeVries says it this way:

"God created us for relationship, both with himself and with others. God's love for his creation resulted in the very personal sacrifice of Christ, so that his relationship with us, broken through sin, might be restored. Being created in god's image, humans also have the need for relationship, not only with the Creator, but also with one another. From the beginning, God determined that it was not good for man to be alone. Even those without a belief in God recognize that one of the most critical needs for all human beings is to feel loved and valued by at least one other person."¹⁴³

¹⁴² Kenda Creasy Dean, "The Sacrament of One Another: Practicing Fidelity through Holy Friendship," *The 1999 Princeton Lectures on Youth Church and Culture. An Unexpected Prophet: What the 21st Century Church Can Learn from Youth Ministry* (2000): 17.

¹⁴³ Mark DeVries, *Sustainable Youth Ministry: Why Most Youth Ministry Doesn't Last and What Your Church Can Do About It* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2008), 216.

And Jesus created the church—a gathering of God’s chosen people—in which to nurture that relationship. The community of Christians is vital to live an abundant life in a broken world. Dean says:

“None of us on the Christian path is ever a lone traveler. We always journey with companions at our side, before us, and trailing behind us. A great cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1), a communion of saints both living and departed, surrounds us. There is no such thing as a solitary Christian, which is both a descriptive reality and a great grace. To be a Christian means we are part of the body of Christ. The local communities in which we live out our faith give faces and names to our companions on the journey.”¹⁴⁴

The community of faith is so important to Christian growth, and even brings young people into a saving relationship with Jesus. “The church and the relationship of the individual Christian to the church has been a key part of our faith from the beginning. We find salvation in our relationship with God in Jesus Christ, and we live out our salvation through the church. In fact, the life of the church often draws people into relationship with Jesus Christ.”¹⁴⁵ The value of the Christian community, especially as it pertains to youth, cannot be under-emphasized. We do not exist in a vacuum, nor can we grow in our spiritual lives alone. Bogman emphasizes the “importance of a ‘supportive peer group’ as a context in which (youth) learn and grow”.¹⁴⁶

Churches cannot allow the world to be the only place where young people find community. A recent survey on why young people leave the church after high school

¹⁴⁴ Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster, *The Godbearing Life : The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1998), 124.

¹⁴⁵ John O. Gooch, *Cheshire Cat Approach to United Methodist Youth Ministry : Getting Where You Want to Go-- with a Smile* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 17.

¹⁴⁶ Dean Borgman, *When Kumbaya Is Not Enough : A Practical Theology for Youth Ministry* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 117.

says that “one in five dropouts (twenty percent) indicated that they did not feel connected with people in their former churches. A similar number (seventeen percent) told us that other social groups outside the church replaced their church fellowship.”¹⁴⁷ DeVries says that “youth are drawn to places where there is at least a critical mass of youth, a place where they don’t feel uncomfortably alone.”¹⁴⁸ In a 2001 study of over ten thousand youth group members, seventy three percent indicated that a ministry with a “welcoming environment where I can be myself” was important in choosing a church fellowship, and seventy percent said that a church that had “quality relationships with teenagers” would be important.¹⁴⁹ Relationships matter. Some experts suggest that “unless a newcomer has at least seven friends in the church, after six months, that student will be gone. It’s not that programs are irrelevant. They are simply secondary.”¹⁵⁰

These relationships with others have the ability to lead one into a relationship with God. Dean says: “Significant relationships with other Christians matter because they teach us something about what God is like—the one who can love us in spite of ourselves and who loves us passionately enough to suffer willingly on our behalf.”¹⁵¹ When young people find these relationships within the body of believers, they are actually engaging in a relationship triangle that includes us, the other believer, and God. Dean calls them “love

¹⁴⁷ Rainer and Rainer, 146.

¹⁴⁸ DeVries, 24-25.

¹⁴⁹ Rick Lawrence, "The Cool Church," *Group* May 6, 2001, 37.

¹⁵⁰ DeVries, 165.

¹⁵¹ Dean and Foster, *The Godbearing Life : The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry*, 27.

triangles”.¹⁵² She posits that these “special friendships” are a means of grace that allow us to gain deeper communication with God, which in turn allows us to lessen the gap “between us and our friend, and we find ourselves experiencing deeper intimacy.”¹⁵³ When the church is practicing effective relational ministry between the youth and each other and between the youth and God, “students meet and fall in love with Christ, students become disciples; students find a safe place to work through their problems; students worship God; and churches grow.”¹⁵⁴

A Theology of Personal Holiness

Personal holiness, also known as sanctification, perfection, and Christian perfection is a goal of all sold out followers of Christ. This is particularly true within the Wesleyan/Methodist movement, as this is the doctrine within Methodism that makes it distinctive from other movements. Christian perfection is truly a biblical concept; in Hebrews 6:1, we are called to go on to ‘perfection’. Jesus calls us to be ‘perfect’ (Matt. 5:48). While none can ever attain perfection in the sense that we can never become non-sinners (faultless or never making a mistake), we can, nevertheless, find ourselves with a perfect heart—a heart that desires no sin, a cleansing of our carnal nature.

There are many aspects of perfection in Scripture. One of the most prevalent is a call to “perfect love”. We see this concept emphasized in 1 John where the writer speaks

¹⁵² Ibid., 128.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Jones, *Postmodern Youth Ministry : Exploring Cultural Shift, Creating Holistic Connections, Cultivating Authentic Community*, 224.

of “perfect love that drives out fear” (v. 18). While it does not mean that our expressions of love to God and others are without fault or error, it does mean that we love without self-seeking, without carnal motivation. “The ultimate goal of the spiritual life is the simple, single-minded love for God...to love God carries with it a love for and a commitment to neighbor.”¹⁵⁵ Christian perfection is a “continual renewal of love and growth in love...a love that matures into greater love.”¹⁵⁶

Another aspect is purity of heart. This happens when what Wesley liked to call “inward sin” is cleansed away; the sin of the heart from which Jesus said acts of sin originate (Mark 7:23). A holy life begins with a holy heart. “(holiness) has to do with the seat of our emotions, motivations and passions before it has to do with our outward actions.”¹⁵⁷

A term that seems to sum up all of this is sanctification, or, within the Wesleyan tradition, “entire sanctification”. This sanctification is a state of constant relationship with God in which we are enabled to continually grow in our spiritual walk. A component of this sanctification is Christian perfection. This does not mean that we are perfect in our judgment or ethical conduct, but rather we are perfect “in the sense that a metal is perfect when extraneous substances are separated from it so that the metal is all one kind. When the carnal nature is cleansed away, we are perfect in the sense of having a pure human

¹⁵⁵ Thomas A. Langford, *Practical Divinity; Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1983), 41.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁵⁷ Derek Tidball, *The Message of Holiness* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2010), 147.

nature—a human nature no longer infected by carnality.”¹⁵⁸ Christian perfection is progressive; it doesn’t happen all at once (although Wesley did teach on both sides of the issue—that attaining Christian perfection is both a process and an immediate and complete transformation), but rather “begins at justification and continue(s) throughout the life of the believer.”¹⁵⁹ Wesley did hold that God could “cut short His work, in whatever degree He pleases, and do the usual work of many years in a moment. He does so in many instances. And yet there is a gradual work both before and after that moment.”¹⁶⁰

A.B. Simpson says it very clearly; we do not eliminate evil, we willingly choose to separate ourselves from it. “Sanctification”, he says “is the putting off, the laying aside of evil by the detaching of ourselves from it and placing an impassable gulf between us and it. We are to separate ourselves not only from our past sins, but from sin as a principle of life.”¹⁶¹ To live a holy life, one needs to make the decision that one wants no more part of the sinful nature of self, and wants to dedicate oneself wholly to God and his purposes in one’s life. One makes a decision not only to detach from sin, but to attach oneself wholly to God.

A large challenge to youth in today’s pluralistic, non-Christian society is to make their actions match their heart. No doubt there are countless young people who are in love

¹⁵⁸ Grider, 389.

¹⁵⁹ Mark R. Quanstrom, *A Century of Holiness Theology: The Doctrine of Entire Sanctification in the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2004), 130.

¹⁶⁰ John Wesley, *The Heart of Wesley's Faith* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1961), 65.

¹⁶¹ A.B. Simpson, *Wholly Sanctified* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1991), 9.

with Jesus, desire (and perhaps have the sanctified heart that accompanies) holiness, but have difficulty living it out in their schools, neighborhoods, sports fields, dance floors and perhaps even in their homes. While it is without doubt that God calls all of us to give him our hearts, there can be no difference between the outer and the inner self. It is the goal of personal holiness that our actions match our heart. “The call to holiness is a call to integrate the outward and the inward dimensions of our lives so they are at ease with each other.”¹⁶²

In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul calls the converts to such a double life. He calls them not only to an inward holiness, but to live it out as well. He wrote this passage to a group of Gentiles living in a culture full of sexual liberty (not unlike the culture in which our teenagers currently find themselves), and men especially were expected to take certain sexual rights for granted. These new converts were not exhibiting a modification in their ethics nor their behavior. Paul was calling these new believers to make a radical change for the sake of Christ, including a change in their moral standards. He was calling them to sexual purity—exhorting them to avoid sexual immorality (4:3-8), and he implored them to accept social responsibility (4:9-12). In short, he called them to an inward and outward lifestyle of holy living.

Our youth find themselves in a similar situation to those in Corinth. In 2 Corinthians, Paul is exhorting the believers there to live a holy life. They are Christians, but they are living in a Corinthian culture. The challenge for them was what was going to take precedence—their Christianity (and holy living), or their pagan culture. Their culture

¹⁶² Tidball, 50.

was of Roman influence and maintained many ties with Greek religion, philosophy and the arts. There was no doubt that they were believers in Christ; the question was their ability to live that out in the culture in which they found themselves. In 2 Cor. 1:1, Paul refers to them as “holy ones”. His meaning here was that they were set apart, chosen by God, and called according to his purpose. In 2 Cor. 6:16 he calls them “people of God”. This term is the “designation for Israel which knows itself to be chosen and called by God in its entire existence—which includes all of its social dimension. To be the people of God in the OT is to be possessed by God.”¹⁶³ As Brower and Johnson further state, “As Deut. 7:6-8 makes clear, ‘people of God’ is to be understood as Israel. Israel was chosen and in choosing her from all nations and saving her from Egypt, God intended for Israel’s conduct to correspond to his own liberating actions. Israel was to be a holy people with a social order which distinguished it from other nations.”¹⁶⁴ Our young people are chosen by God, set apart to be holy. As such, they are called to live moral lives and to replicate God’s own holiness and character.

A theology of personal holiness has never been more important for our youth than it is today. We live in a world that is truly disturbed. There is an explosion in the “exploitation of sex and lust under the guise of art, literature, advertising, and entertainment” which have brought a “terrible harvest in decaying morals and ethics.”¹⁶⁵ Our educational system seems to stress unbelief in God and the Bible, causing a severe

¹⁶³ Kent E. Brower and Andy Johnson, *Holiness and Ecclesiology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 204.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 205.

¹⁶⁵ Quanstrom, 119.

loss in our collective moral compass. Our school systems in particular, and sports in general, disregard God's commandments and violation of the Sabbath. Nothing is sacred. To be true to our faith, one needs an ethos of personal holiness.

Scripture teaches that this holiness, the sanctification of our spirits, is a gift from God. We cannot attain it on our own. We cannot simply will ourselves to love God perfectly, to act in a manner that is holy in God's sight. Rather, we must rely on the gift of God through the Holy Spirit to make it happen in our lives. In *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster says:

The will has the same deficiency as the law—it can only deal with externals. It is not sufficient to bring about the necessary transformation of the inner spirit. When we despair of gaining inner transformation through human powers of will and determination, we are open to a wonderful new realization: inner righteousness is a gift from God to be graciously received. The change within us is God's work, not ours. The demand is for an inside job, and only God can work from the inside. We cannot attain or earn this righteousness of the kingdom of God; it is a grace that is given.”¹⁶⁶

Practical theology is that which motivates one to put one's faith into action, which enables one to critically interact with one's environment in a theological way. For ministry to youth, two aspects of practical theology (that of relational theology and personal holiness) will, this author posits, propel youth to think and act radically different as God's chosen people—holy, sanctified and pure in heart.

¹⁶⁶ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980), 5.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Treatment Hypothesis

In brief, the hypothesis of this ministry project proposes that if youth were to see and experience the church as a “third place” in their lives (the first being home, and the second being school), and the ministry emphasis placed on connecting with each other and with God, then youth would make decisions to go deeper in their relationship, commitment to and discipleship of Jesus.

This hypothesis was based on collaboration with the leaders of the youth ministry of Highland United Methodist Church in Fort Thomas, Kentucky. Most of these leaders had youth who participated in this project, and thus were invested in a successful model of ministry that fostered an environment where their children would become fully devoted followers of Jesus. As the project took root, youth themselves were added to this leadership circle, and provided valuable insights into creating a model of ministry that would achieve the end goals.

Because of the nature of youth, and their need to trust the church, this project was developed over a course of several years. The hypothesis morphed and developed, and was based in part on the author’s own experience as a foster parent for seventeen plus

years, as a parent, and as a staff person within the field of youth ministry for over twenty-five years.

Additionally, some ten years prior to the implementation of this project, the context church held a series of meetings where they fleshed out a vision for the church. One of the primary goals of that vision was to take advantage of the locality of the church building to the high school and middle school (directly across the street). The church had developed an interest in, and a vision to reach, the young people of the Ft. Thomas community, and desired to leverage its primary asset to youth (its physical location). This project was, in part, a fulfillment of that vision and received extensive resources and support from the church at large.

Intervention

A level system, patterned upon John Wesley's original class and band system, was created. Several levels of ministry were offered to youth which were based upon a funnel approach (see Appendix F). At the top of the funnel one would find large group opportunities in which people could come together and join in fellowship. The large group activities were held in the church building, but were generally associated with non-church types of activities, such as Fifth Quarters which were group gatherings after home football games.

As the youth got more involved in the large group activities, they were encouraged to become more involved with disciple making activities such as Wednesday evening and Sunday morning. Using the funnel visual, as one went deeper in one's relationship and commitment to Christ, the funnel shrunk, indicating fewer participants

towards the bottom, with the most participation being at the top of the funnel where the large group activities targeted youth in general; the Discipling activities targeting those who had shown an interest and a desire to go deeper were located at the lower end of the funnel system.

This project encountered a number of barriers in its approach. The first barrier was clearly youth's potential negative preconceived notions about what church was. This project had to work very diligently at erasing their preexisting judgments about church, and tread lightly on any type of presentation that bordered on legalism, Christianity "don'ts", and boring teachings.

An additional barrier was that this was a denominational church. An attempt was made to overcome negative labels of denominationalism, and instead focus on providing fellowship and encouragement to young people based upon an Acts 2:42 model of being the church.

A third barrier existed with the other churches in our small community. There is a history of mistrust because of a period of proselytizing with one of the churches in this community about ten years ago, causing a significant exodus of membership and participation in many churches. Consequently, the leadership of the churches within our community was very nervous about this particular church's effort to reach young people. This was overcome somewhat by including them at the beginning of this project. Over time, as the churches saw that this project was not going to cause any of their young people to "jump ship" to this church, they withdrew from the project but did not stand in the way of this church continuing in its endeavors.

A very large non-denominational church in Cincinnati (of which Fort Thomas is a bedroom community) drew significant numbers of young people from the Fort Thomas community. While initially a barrier to young people's participation in this particular context, this barrier was overcome by carefully implementing the relational strategies in the project, and were soon able to assimilate youth who participated at Crossroads into this ministry project while supporting them in their worship life at the mega-church.

A final barrier to this project was the Young Life program in Fort Thomas. While the stated purpose of the Young Life program is to evangelize young people and get them connected with local churches, the Young Life program in Fort Thomas does not work that way. They do not connect their youth with any church in the community, and maintain their activity-based ministry for the entirety of a youth's middle high and high school career. It was, and remains, difficult to compete for the attention of the youth who love Young Life's emphasis on an entertainment model of ministry. Additionally, one of the official "tactics" of the Young Life program nationally, was to intentionally seek the most popular demographic in the school system (athletes and cheerleaders) with the understanding that youth who wanted to be seen with the "in crowd" would follow the most popular to the Young Life meetings. Interviews and focus group discussions have indicated that Young Life has been successful in that arena in Ft. Thomas, and this project was not effective in any sense with reaching out and including those that Young Life targeted.

Research Design

This project utilized surveys and focus groups at all levels of the funnel programs. Electronic surveys were used for those participating, and focus groups, interviews and a triangulation process was held for groups at all discipleship levels. Youth, leaders and parents were surveyed and interviewed, ensuring that all stakeholders in this project had an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of this project.

This study used a variety of data collection methods, and thus, Cresswell would consider that a mixed methods approach was utilized. This author agrees with his statement that “collecting diverse types of data best provides an understanding of a research problem.”¹

This study used post positivist knowledge, a form of quantitative research, to determine if certain aspects of youth’s spiritual lives (bible reading, worship attendance, giving, empathy towards others) changed as a result of their in the small Discipleship Group, located near the bottom of the funnel. In an effort to ascertain if youth were changed as a result of their participation in this group, a set of questions was drafted at the beginning of the semester to gauge on a scale of one to five (with one being not at all experiencing a particular aspect of spirituality and five being experiencing this aspect on a daily or continual basis), and then followed up at the end of the semester with an identical post-test. We were then able to calculate, on a numerical scale, the growth in spiritual disciplines of the young people within the discipleship group. Thus, we

¹ John W. Creswell, *Research Design : Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2003), 21.

measured their attitudes and analyzed those using statistical procedures and hypothesis testing.

This study also surveyed the parents of each of the participants in the discipleship group to measure their observations of the effectiveness of their child's group participation, including changes in attitudes of their child (the actual participants in the group) since they became involved in the Discipleship group. One of the challenges was that we were unable to give both pre and post tests to the parents, so the survey question phrased: "Since becoming a part of the discipleship group, my child has...." Thus, this survey was a form of qualitative research, using constructivist knowledge claims, ethnographic design and the parents' observation of their child's behavior since becoming a member of the Discipleship group.

In one aspect of the quantitative research, this researcher offered an identical pre and post survey to those in the discipleship group, as well as to those who were not in this group, thus employing a form of "experimental research".²

In the qualitative segment of the research, this researcher employed the use of *Ethnography* by interviewing participants and observing changes in their attitude and demeanor over a set period of time.³ In order to validate this information, this researcher compared his observations to those of the other leaders in both the discipleship group and the general groups offered within this context in order to ascertain the validity of his conclusions, thus employing the use of triangulation.

² John W. Creswell, *Research Design : Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2009), 12.

³ *Ibid.*, 13.

Measurement

This project utilized one-time surveys on the perceptions and attitudes of youth in this community toward Highland United Methodist Church. This survey was given electronically, and was open to any youth who had access to a computer. This survey was given toward the end of this project. The respondents remained anonymous, thereby soliciting responses that perhaps were more open since they could not be tracked back to the individual taking the survey. Unfortunately, a pre-project survey was not given, so changes in attitudes and perceptions of this youth ministry could not be attained, but current attitudes toward this church were clearly ascertained. Questions were asked that were designed to measure youth's perception of not only the effectiveness of the goals of the project, but also to measure their perception of this particular church's overarching goal as a place where Christ is proclaimed and lives are changed. This survey ascertained whether or not the youth in this community perceived that this church was a church that was accomplishing those goals.

In summary, using comparative methods, pre and post-tests were given to the Discipleship group and their parents. The Discipleship group ministry is located towards the very bottom of the funnel approach, and holds the most dedicated participants of the youth group. Through this testing, this researcher was able to identify any change in behavior and attitudes as a result of youth's participation in the Discipleship group. Additionally, we gave a survey to the parents of these young people asking them if they had seen any change in their youth's attitude or certain behaviors as a result of participating in the Discipleship Group.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MINISTRY PROJECT

Rationale

The biblical and historical rationale for this ministry project was based in part on John Wesley's class and band system. Wesley's premise was that placing people in small groups was more conducive to establishing relationships that foster mutual accountability, and nurtures holy living and Godly character building on the part of the participant. As a person was able to meet the criteria of a particular stage in his or her progress, that person was invited to move to the next level which required a deeper commitment and demanded that the participant exhibit additional fruits of holy living. Wesley used James 5 as his rationale, specifically James 5:16 where Scripture says: "Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed."

Recently, a phenomenon has come into popularity within Christian circles known as the "Third Place" concept. This term was originally coined by sociologist Ray Oldenburg. Rainer says: "The concept of a third place involves a gathering place for people separate from the home (the first place) and work (the second place). For this project's purpose, the second place would be school. The third place is an anchor of the community which facilitates relational interaction between people in the community."¹

¹ Rainer and Rainer, 61.

Rainer goes on to say that three fourths of formerly unchurched say that they were attracted to a church with a third-place facility, and that healthy churches that have third place facilities are more likely to attract the unchurched.² Dean says: “Although secondary to families, local congregations do exert a profound influence on the formation of (a youth’s) soul. At their best...youth groups...provide teenagers ongoing communities of care and not simply catechetical content. These communities serve as extended families for adolescents who are beginning to distance themselves from their families of origin.”³ The church in which this project was developed and implemented has intentionally sought to be that “third place” for the youth in the community of Fort Thomas, Kentucky. Through its envisioning process, the congregation has certainly taken to heart Jesus’ example of reaching out and including children (youth). “Jesus’ teaching about receiving children as the mark of true greatness places children at the center of the community’s attention as prime objects of its love and service, and requires of all who would be great in the community to serve children.”⁴

The third place concept is crucial for developing safe relationships. Relationships are what today’s young people thrive upon. The group process found in the third place is instrumental to forming young people’s self-identities. Dean posits that “The most important mirrors...are the eyes of peers and respected adults who reflect a “self” that

² Ibid., 62.

³ Dean and Foster, *The Godbearing Life : The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry*, 80.

⁴ Judith M. Gundry Volf and Miroslav Volf, *A Spacious Heart : Essays on Identity and Belonging, Christian Mission and Modern Culture* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1997), 44.

young people accept almost without question. For this reason, relationships and peer groups play a pivotal part as youth navigate the “mirroring” process necessary to identity formation.”⁵ She goes on to advocate that the “best place to find God moments is in the midst of the daily lives of our youth; in their families, at the local eatery, on the football field, and in the midst of the daily activities of congregational life.”⁶

As has already been previously discussed, this ministry context operates within a youth culture where the school system emphasizes academics and extra-curricular activities to a extensive degree. This church is located within a significantly upper middle-class community, and little material need exists within the community. Most of the attention of the youth is focused upon their academic, extra-curricular and social concerns. Bass clearly articulates the youth community in Fort Thomas when he posits that “Culture and economic forces pervading almost every corner of this society press in upon us, cajoling us to try to satisfy this hunger for a life well spent with a material form of spending that finally does not offer the rewards we truly seek. Instead of persevering in our search for ways of life abundant, therefore, we find our desire drawn to lifestyles of abundance. Instead of pursuing a way of life that is abundant in love and mercy and justice, we chase, by spending, what is known as the “good life”.”⁷ Wall succinctly identifies the challenge within this particular community: “This is the challenge we face

⁵ Dean and Foster, *The Godbearing Life : The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry*, 44.

⁶ Ibid., 75.

⁷ Dorothy C. Bass, "Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ: The Consumer and the Practitioner," *The 2000 Princeton Lectures on Youth Church and Culture: Life Together: Practicing Faith with Adolescents* (2001): 2.

as we seek to minister to the youth in our care. They live in an environment so secular that our efforts to address religious concerns are as difficult as the efforts of a salmon racing upstream to get home.”⁸

Through the implementation of this project, it was sensed that the tide might be turning away from an attitude of self, and that young people are truly exhibiting a sense of dissatisfaction with their lives that presented this context with an opportunity to reach out and minister. As Moore says, “people are finally beginning to realize that secularism can’t save us; that making more money and buying more things will not give a sense of meaning or fulfillment or security or happiness; that a full stomach is not worth much, if the spirit is starving. The bleakness which so many feel today is driving people to raise fundamental questions about life, and that is a healthy sign.”⁹ This context intentionally set out to develop an atmosphere where those questions can be asked and answered.

The driving force behind this project was young people’s need for relationships. It was felt that if a ministry were developed that capitalized on young people’s need and desire for peer relationships, then within the context of the church their need for peer relationships could be met and they could then be pointed towards a truly sustainable relationship with Christ, their Savior. This project sought to create safe places for young people to socialize and intentionally did not present a list of demands or prohibitions, at least in the opportunities for larger group experiences at the top of the funnel. Pahl

⁸ James M. Wall, "Practicing Faith with Adolescents: Searching for Grace in the Stuffiness of the Secular," *The 2000 Princeton Lectures on Youth Church and Culture, Life Together: Practicing Faith with Adolescents* (2001): 71.

⁹ James W. Moore, *Attitude Is Your Paintbrush : It Colors Every Situation* (Nashville: Dimensions for Living, 1998).

reiterated this philosophy when he said: “Youth ministers will not answer youth’s needs by offering them moralistic pronouncements of “just say no.” They will meet young people’s needs when they provide them rites of passage that say yes to practices offering young people the intimacy, challenges, community, and grace they seek through the currently popular practices.”¹⁰

Over the four-year course of this project, the movement of young people from the upper levels of the funnel programming to the lowest level (called the Discipleship group) was able to be tracked. A significant amount of this research study was focused on the Discipleship Group. A pre- and post-test during one semester of the Discipleship class was given to the participants, and an end of semester survey was given to the parents of those in the Discipleship group. The questions focused on spiritual disciplines, general attitudes, and attitudes towards the participant’s relationship with God, and measured the changes as a result of participating in the Discipleship group.

Additionally, a general survey was offered to youth at large in the community of Fort Thomas. This was done through the social media known as Facebook. This survey measured the attitudes of the survey taker toward Highland United Methodist and the goals of its youth ministry. One of the challenges of this general survey was that it clearly reached those that already had a connection with Highland United Methodist, and therefore was probably not indicative of the community at large. In order to receive an invitation to participate in the survey, they would have to have “befriended” the

¹⁰ Pahl, 173.

originator of the survey; it could safely be assumed that they had enough of a positive connection with this church to befriend one of its pastors.

As a starting point, in August of 2006, when this program was in its envisioning and development stage, Highland United Methodist church had an active youth group of approximately twelve, active being defined as participating in two or more activities per week (worship plus one other youth activity such as Sunday School or Youth Fellowship). All twelve were from families who regularly attended this fellowship.

Survey Results

General Youth Survey Data

This survey was distributed via FACEBOOK and e-mail contact to everyone in the church youth database, and those youth in the community who had befriended the author of this paper, the Associate Pastor of Highland United Methodist Church. There were 144 invitations to take the survey, and 35 responded, resulting in slightly less than a twenty-five percent participation rate (24.3%). This survey measured the reputation of Highland United Methodist among the population targeted for this research program. It sought to measure the perception of the youth within this community to the ministries and goals of Highland United Methodist Church.

The first question asked for the respondent's grade in school. Each grade level in the Fort Thomas School District averages 185 in number. With a total of thirty-five responses, a participation rate of 3.1% of the entire youth population of Fort Thomas was achieved.

Table 1. Grade level participation

Grade	Percentage	Number Responding
6 th	5.7%	2
7 th	8.6%	3
8 th	11.4%	4
9 th	42.9%	15
10 th	11.4%	4
11 th	5.7%	2
12 th	14.3%	5

Table 1 reflects the average participation in the youth group as a whole; the largest population within the regular youth group at Highland United Methodist is ninth grade, with the fewest being sixth grade.

The results indicated that the all of the respondents participate in some level of ministry at Highland United Methodist. The results indicate that approximately half of the respondents to this survey would be considered active in the overall ministry of Highland United Methodist (2 or more activities per week), while approximately one-third participate in the general outreach or “fun” activities where the exposure to the Gospel is minimal and exploratory in nature:

Table 2. Participation level at Highland United Methodist Church

	Percentage	Number Responding
Attend 2 or more faith related activities a week	45.7%	16
Attend occasional faith related activities	25.7%	9
Attend only fun activities (5th quarters, overnights)	11.4%	4
Participate only in the Underground or Twisty grill	17.1%	6

Given the fact that four years ago, this church had an active youth ministry of twelve youth, all of whom had a family connection with the church, the statistics found in table 2 suggest that the funnel approach to creating differing opportunities of connection with the church with varying degrees of commitment have resulted in the effective outreach to the youth within the community of Fort Thomas, Kentucky.

A question asked what church affiliation the respondent held, if any (Table 3). Five did not respond to the question, while six indicated no church affiliation. It is of note that the majority (sixty-six percent) of the respondents who indicated “Highland United Methodist” as the church with which they identify had no other family members connected with the church. Further, five of the six youth who responded “other” listed a dual relationship—Highland United Methodist and another local church, three of which were Crossroads. Crossroads is a mega church in the Cincinnati area. Highland United Methodist Church’s experience with the dual relationship youth shows that their families attend Crossroads for worship (as do the respondents), but their “youth group” connection is at Highland United Methodist. This can be attributed to a number of

factors, as indicated in informal interviews with the respondents. The primary factor cited by these youth is that Crossroads is too big for young people to connect with their peers in a meaningful way. A secondary factor indicates that the travel distance involved between Ft. Thomas and Crossroads would significantly hamper meaningful involvement outside of the worship experience.

Table 3. Church with which respondents identify

Church Name	Percentage	Number Responding
No particular church	3.3%	1
Highland Hills Baptist	3.3%	1
Highland United Methodist	63.3%	19
First Christian, Fort Thomas	0.0%	0
First Presbyterian Church, Fort Thomas	0.0%	0
St. Thomas Catholic, Fort Thomas	6.7%	2
Other Catholic	3.3%	1
Christ UCC, Fort Thomas	0.0%	0
Crossroads, Cincinnati	20.0%	6
Other (please specify)	6	

A question about their belief system was asked (Table.4). Ninety-four percent of the respondents indicated that they were Christian.

Table 4. Identification with Christianity

Response	Percentage	Number Responding
Yes	94.3%	33
No	5.7%	2

If a respondent affirmed that they were Christian, a follow up question was asked as to their level of commitment (Table 5). No criteria was given to them as to what behaviors would be marks of a certain level of commitment, so they were able to use their own judgment in assigning their own level of commitment to the Christian faith.

Table 5. Level of Christian commitment

	Percentage	Number Responding
Absolutely committed to it	24.2%	8
moderately committed to it	57.6%	19
not too committed to it	18.2%	6
not at all committed to it	0.0%	0

If a respondent affirmed a Christian label, they were then asked to expand on how they practiced their Christianity utilizing specific Christian behaviors (the rating scale had a range of one to four).

Table 6. Christian behaviors

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Average
Attend worship	2	6	6	19	3.27
Attend Sunday school/Bible Study	4	7	6	16	3.03
Attend a youth group	2	5	5	21	3.36
Read your Bible	3	17	9	4	2.42
Pray	1	2	9	21	3.52

Of those who indicated that they were “absolutely committed” to their Christian faith, the behavior responses were as such:

Table 7. Behaviors of “absolutely committed” youth

Answer Options	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Rating Average
Attend worship	0	0	0	8	4.00
Attend Sunday school/Bible Study	0	0	0	8	4.00
Attend a youth group	1	0	1	6	3.50
Read your Bible	0	1	3	4	3.38
Pray	0	0	1	7	3.88

Of those who were “moderately committed” to their faith, they indicated their participation in the same Christian activities as such:

Table 8. Behaviors of “moderately committed” youth

Answer Options	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Rating Average
Attend worship	1	2	5	11	3.37
Attend Sunday school/Bible Study	1	4	6	8	3.11
Attend a youth group	0	3	3	13	3.53
Read your Bible	0	13	6	0	2.32
Pray	1	1	5	12	3.47

A comparison of behaviors between those who are “absolutely committed” and those who are “moderately committed” to the Christian faith shows a distinct relationship between increased participation in spiritual disciplines with an increased level of commitment to the Christian faith. This would also suggest a validation of the premise of

the funnel approach to youth ministry; as the expectations get more significant, fewer numbers participate in the religious experience.

A series of possible views of the context church was presented, and the respondents were asked to rate how they viewed Highland United Methodist using various indicators that measured how effective this project was in reaching young people (Table 9). The responses were collected using a scale of one to four, with four being the most favorable view of this church.

Table 9. Perception of Highland United Methodist by community youth.

Answer Options	never	some- times	most of the time	all the time	Rating Average
Fun place to be	0	5	16	13	3.24
Welcoming to teenagers	0	3	8	24	3.60
Caring about teenagers	0	3	5	27	3.69
A place where Jesus is proclaimed	0	5	7	22	3.50
A safe place for me to go	0	4	6	25	3.60
A place to hang out with my friends	0	6	13	16	3.29
A place where I can learn about my faith	1	5	6	21	3.42

The respondents were asked to share what they would look for in a church youth ministry. The following responses were received:

Table 10. What young people look for in a youth group

Answer Options	Not Important	Somewhat Important	very Important	Rating Average
It's my family's church	13	13	8	1.85
how friendly the people are	1	10	23	2.65
how much the people seem to care about each other	1	5	28	2.79
the quality of the teaching	3	8	23	2.59
the theological beliefs of the church	4	15	15	2.32
how much the church is involved in helping poor and disadvantaged people	5	20	9	2.12
how much you like the pastor or youth leaders	3	12	19	2.47
how many people your age attend the church	3	12	19	2.47
the style of worship or music	3	18	13	2.29
how many of your friends go to that church	5	11	18	2.38
how far the church is located from your home	12	16	6	1.82
how active the youth ministry is	4	12	18	2.41

Since one of the primary premises of this project is that relationships are what matter most to young people, these numbers seem to affirm that the programs designed to strengthen peer relationships are the ones most appealing to young people. The highest “mean” value was attributed to “how much the people seem to care about each other”, followed closely by “how friendly the people are”. Four of the top five responses are

relational in nature. The other item in the top five is the “quality of the teaching”, suggesting that content is important; young people want to participate in something meaningful. A very interesting response was the low importance given to the youth group being in the church that their family attends. On a scale of one to four, this received only a 1.85 rating, which was the second lowest score of all the questions. This statistic suggests that at this age, youth are able to make decisions about their faith participation in large part distinct from their families of origin.

Discipleship Group Survey

At the core of this project, “the ultimate goal” of this ministry project, is the Discipleship Group. This is at the very bottom of the funnel system, as it is the most intense and has the most requirements associated with any of the ministry options offered in this context. It also has the fewest participants, being eighteen in number. It is of note that this eighteen represents approximately twenty percent of the active participation (two or more activities per week) of this ministry context. It is also of note that three of the eighteen (or sixteen percent) come from families who do not regularly attend this fellowship. One of those three is from a non-churched family.

The requirements of the Discipleship group are significant (see Appendix A), and young people are held accountable for their participation. The weekly Discipleship group consists of teaching, discussion, prayer and accountability groups. The young people are broken into groups of two to four people each for accountability purposes. They ask each other a modified version of Wesley’s questions in his Class and Band meetings (see Appendix B).

Youth are expected to participate weekly in worship, another group Bible study, the weekly Discipleship group, and Monday morning prayer. Additionally, youth are expected to take leadership within the youth ministry, including each accountability group leading a Barnabas group. All of the youth in the youth database of this church are assigned to a Barnabas group. It is the responsibility of the accountability partners in the Discipleship group to maintain regular contact with the members of their Barnabas group, offering words of encouragement, support and opportunities for fellowship. This system keeps all of the youth in our ministry structure connected in some way, and lessens the likelihood that any particular youth would fall through the cracks of the system. It also gives the Discipleship group opportunities to mentor and exercise leadership with their peers. Many in the Discipleship group also take leadership responsibilities within the care group structure of the overall youth ministry of Highland United Methodist Church (see Appendix E for a description of the Care Group ministry).

Because the emphasis of the Discipleship group rests primarily on instilling attitudes and behaviors of holy living, a pre- and post- survey was given to all Discipleship group participants from August 2010 to December 2010. This survey measured their growth over the four month period in relation to specific behaviors and attitudes that the youth held.

Disciple Group Parents Survey

When dealing with youth, it is imperative to have the support and knowledge of the parents of the youth. At all stages of ministry, it is a goal of the context church to share and support the parents in their responsibility to train and disciple their children.

The parents were not only a source of encouragement to their children, they were in a unique position to help ascertain the effectiveness of the ministries provided. To that end, a parental survey was given. A participation rate of 100% was achieved.

Table 11 represents the parent's views of their youth's growth in holy living attributes since their child joined the Discipleship group.

Table 11. Parent's behavioral assessment

Answer Options	Decreased Greatly	De-creased Somewhat	Has had no effect	In-creased Some-what	In-creased Greatly	Rating Aver-age
Overall general attitude	0	0	3	8	3	3.87
Church Participation	0	0	3	7	7	4.24
Reading/Studying the Bible	0	0	5	8	3	3.88
Empathy/Care to others	0	0	3	8	4	4.07
Financial giving	0	0	3	8	4	4.07
Attitude toward parents	0	1	4	8	2	3.73
Attitude Toward siblings	0	0	6	7	1	3.64
Attitude at school	0	0	5	8	1	3.71

The results suggest that overall the parents sensed growth in their child's church participation, empathy and care towards others, as well as their financial giving. It is noted that a significant number of parents chose the option of "has had no effect" on behaviors. At initial glance, this might suggest that this group was not effective in that area with youth, at least as far as the parent was concerned. While that appearance was, in

fact, correct for two of the youth, several parents commented that their youth were already investing significant amounts of time in Bible reading, had no real issues in their relationships at home or with siblings, and were doing well in school, so there was no real need for improvement in that area.

There was one youth out of the eighteen whose parent responded with across the board significantly lower scores than his peers, and this researcher noted identical responses of non-investment in the program on the part of the youth's own survey which is contained in the next section. There was a direct correlation between his own investment in the program and lack of attaining growth in the program and the responses his parents provided. Because he was not fully invested in the program, he did not receive the same "rate of return", so to speak, as did other youth who were clearly more invested in the ideals and outcome of the program. The majority of his parent's responses were under the heading "has had no effect", and this youth's parents indicated that his attitude towards them as parental figures had "decreased somewhat". His parents ranked four out of the six core requirements of the Discipleship as "significant in value", so there was a significant difference between the value that the parent put on the Discipleship group and the value that the youth placed on the group. The parent valued the experience more than the youth did. In all other instances, the value that the youth placed on the programs core requirements closely mirrored that of their parents. This suggests that this particular youth had values and attitudes toward the Discipleship group that were significantly different than his parents.

Parents were asked why they believed their youth joined the Discipleship group (Table 12). This question was asked to ascertain parental influence, if any, in their young persons participation in this optional group.

Table 12. Reasons for youth participation

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Parental pressure	0.0%	0
Desire to grow in relationship with Jesus	88.2%	15
Wanted to be with friends/all their friends were doing it	52.9%	9
Something to keep them busy	0.0%	0
Additional benefits afforded to the discipleship group (retreats, outings, etc.)	17.6%	3
Other (please specify)	1	

Parents were asked how much value they themselves put on the core requirements of Discipleship group participation.

Table 13. Value parent's place on Discipleship Group commitment requirements

Answer Options	Not valuable at all	Neutral	Somewhat valuable	Extremely valuable	Rating Average
Monday Morning Prayer	0	2	3	11	3.56
Weekly Worship	0	1	0	16	3.88
Service to Others	0	0	0	17	4.00
Sunday afternoon discipleship group	0	1	3	13	3.71
Other weekly study group	0	2	2	13	3.65
Retreats	0	1	5	11	3.59

Parents were asked to share how much encouragement their child needed in order to faithfully participate in the core areas of the Discipleship program (Table 14). It is worth noting that four of the youth in the Discipleship group were enrolled in an “early bird” class at the high school that met at seven a.m. daily, and as such, they were unable to participate in Monday morning prayer, and were thus excused. It is also noted that the one student who needed “significant amounts of encouragement” to attend retreats was the only sixth grader in the program, and was surrounded by older youth and had no one

his own age. The youth did go on the retreats, and was warmly welcomed and received by all in the discipleship group, and this author posits that if this question were asked again of this parent, the answer would be significantly different.

Table 14. Level of encouragement needed for participation

Answer Options	Significant amount of encouragement	Gentle prodding	No encouragement needed; they just do it	N/A (eg: they are in early bird)	Avg.
Monday Morning Prayer	1	0	12	4	3.12
Sunday Afternoon Discipleship Group	0	2	15	0	2.88
Retreats	1	1	14	1	2.88
Service projects to others	0	5	12	0	2.71
Weekly worship	0	0	16	0	3.00
Weekly additional study/growth group	0	3	14	0	2.82

Parents were then asked about how they felt about the requirements of the group (Table 15). It is noted that for the youth to honor their commitments, it takes significant family investment and alteration of their own schedules to accommodate their young person in the Discipleship group.

Table 15. Commitment requirements of Discipleship Group

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Just Right	76.5%	13
Too demanding	35.3%	6
Not demanding enough	0.0%	0

Those who indicated that the commitment response was “too demanding” had some differences in the value placed on the core requirements of the Discipleship group (Table 16):

Table 16. Parent’s value of Discipleship Group Components, “too demanding”

Answer Options	Not valuable at all	Neutral	Somewhat valuable	Extremely valuable	Rating Average
Monday Morning Prayer	0	1	1	3	3.40
Weekly Worship	0	0	0	6	4.00
Service to Others	0	0	0	6	4.00
Sunday afternoon discipleship group	0	1	1	4	3.50
Other weekly study group	0	1	1	4	3.50
Retreats	0	1	2	3	3.33

Those who indicated that the commitment level was “just right” indicate, on average, a higher value on the core components of the Discipleship group:

Table 17. Parent’s value of Discipleship Group Components, “too demanding

Answer Options	Not valuable at all	Neutral	Somewhat valuable	Extremely valuable	Rating Average
Monday Morning Prayer	0	1	2	10	3.69
Weekly Worship	0	1	0	12	3.85
Service to Others	0	0	0	13	4.00
Sunday afternoon discipleship group	0	0	3	10	3.77
Other weekly study group	0	1	1	11	3.77
Retreats	0	0	3	10	3.77

Those who indicated that the commitment level was “too demanding” valued every core aspect at a lower rate with the exception of weekly worship.

Disciple Group Youth Pre- and Post -Test

Each youth participating in the Discipleship group was given a survey at the beginning of the semester, in August of 2010. They were given a survey with identical questions in December of 2010 to measure any growth in behaviors or change in attitude toward certain ideals that the Discipleship group wanted to instill in the participants. The results are as follows:

Table 18: Youth's pre and post test behaviors and attitudes

Answer Options	Pretest Average	Post-test Average	Change
God knows and loves me personally	4.71%	4.65%	-1.27%
I'm going to spend eternity with Jesus	4.64%	4.88%	5.17%
Knowledge of Scripture	3.64%	3.82%	4.95%
Prayer Life	3.88%	4.11%	5.93%
Financial Giving	3.23%	3.23%	0.00%
Relationship with Others	3.76%	3.59%	-4.52%
Worship Life	4.53%	4.65%	2.65%
Read my Bible	3.11%	3.11%	0.00%
Understand Purpose of my Life	3.23%	3.59%	11.15%
Serve Others	3.47%	3.82%	10.09%
Priorities in Life	3.80%	4.20%	10.53%

The most significant increase was found in the youth's understanding that God had called them to a purpose bigger than themselves, followed closely by their desire to serve others and set priorities in their lives. One of the means that this project used to increase youth's awareness of God's purpose for their life was the benediction process

after each and every encounter, whether in a large group gathering meant for the general public or the small Discipleship group gatherings. Without exception, the words used by the leader included “leave knowing that God has a plan for your life, and that He calls you to be more than you can be on your own”. This concept was drilled into youth at every encounter over the semester. Further, during a discipleship retreat, one of the exercises was a “gifts based assessment” tool, which allowed the youth to answer many multiple choice questions, following which their top spiritual gifts were revealed to them. This also helped in raising the average score of the respondents.

In this particular quarter, the teaching times used an acrostic on the word “DISCIPLE” (Appendix G) which touched on all the attitudes and behaviors stated in the core outcomes of the Discipleship group. While there was a week of teaching on financial stewardship, or “Imitating God’s Generosity”, there was absolutely no change in behavior on the part of the group as a whole.

In the post-survey, youth had an opportunity to respond to the question: “What could we do to make the Discipleship group better”. Forty-two percent of the respondents indicated “more service opportunities”. Their request mimicked the value in the post-survey test that they placed on serving others. The other area that saw no movement was in Bible reading. Two weeks of teaching time was devoted to that discipline, and resulted in no increase in the behavior desired.

An identical survey was given to eighteen respondents who were not in the Discipleship group (Table 19). Those taking this survey were regular participants in our Wednesday evening and Sunday morning activities, and as such had moved past the

introductory or exploratory ministries of the church and were receiving instruction in being a disciple of Christ. This survey was given in October of 2010. Table 19 describes the results:

Table 19. Discipleship Group and non Discipleship Group participants

Answer Options	Post-test Disciples	Non Disciple	Difference
God knows and loves me personally	4.65%	3.60%	-22.58%
I'm going to spend eternity with Jesus	4.88%	4.54%	-6.97%
Knowledge of Scripture	3.82%	3.11%	-18.59%
Prayer Life	4.11%	2.89%	-29.68%
Financial Giving	3.23%	2.67%	-17.34%
Relationship with Others	3.59%	3.74%	4.18%
Worship Life	4.65%	4.48%	-3.66%
Read my Bible	3.11%	2.64%	-15.11%
Understand Purpose of my Life	3.59%	2.71%	-24.51%
Serve Others	3.82%	3.01%	-21.20%
Priorities in Life	4.20%	3.24%	-22.86%

One cannot help but note the huge difference in attitude and behaviors between those that were in the Discipleship group and those who were part of the regular youth ministry. It can be surmised that those who were in the Discipleship group were more dedicated and invested in their own spiritual group than those who were not, but our survey found that while this is generally true, this was not the case across the board. There are several youth within the church fellowship that scored as high (or higher) than

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS

In August of 2006, the participation in the youth programs of Highland United Methodist Church consisted of approximately twelve regular attendees. All of these attendees were from families who faithfully participated in the regular worship and ministry life of the church. In January, 2011, this church had a regular participation of over seventy youth, with over fifty percent of those regular youth coming from families who were not engaged in the worship and ministry life of the church. Additionally, this church had on its mailing list over 150 youth who had come to some sort of outreach event in the past year. These increased numbers were the direct result of an intentional focus on reaching youth in the community of Fort Thomas, Kentucky through the implementation of this project.

Several years before the implementation of this project, the church created a visioning process to determine what they wanted their identity to be, and what kind of ministry they felt God was call them to. As a result of that visioning process, they looked at their “assets” as a church, and determined that one of their best assets was their physical location—on the town plaza and directly across the street from both the Middle and Senior High schools. Thus, the church listed children’s and youth ministries as two of their top priorities to pursue. They hired a magnificent, energetic, organized and loving children’s director (who has been with the church over eight years, providing needed

continuity and stability). The children's ministry grew dramatically, and served as a significant feeder into the youth ministry, the fruits of which really began to materialize in August of 2007 with a new influx of sixth graders.

Also as a result of this visioning process, the church decided to heavily invest in a full time youth worker. Prior to this author's arrival at this church, the church went through several full-time youth directors, with mixed success. At this time, the church decided to elevate this position to one of Associate Pastor, and they sought out someone with more experience and a different view of youth ministry (e.g. viewed ministry as more than just becoming friends with their youth). That is when this author came into the position.

Because of the church's prior visioning process, there was little need to "convince" the church of the importance of youth ministry. Unlike what many other churches experience, this church did not see their youth as a group of people that needed to be "managed", but rather saw their youth as integral to the life and ministry of the church. The attitude of the church leadership played an integral part in the ability to forge ahead with new ideas. This author very rarely experienced pushback on new ideas or initiatives in the area of ministry to youth, and the church was always supportive of the resources necessary to implement those initiatives. As an example, the youth program budget was at \$5,000 in 2006; in 2011 it is \$22,000 (plus income from fundraisers, and not including staffing). The value of ministry to youth and children is so great within this church that at the 2011 council budget meeting (where \$50,000 needed to be trimmed from the 2011 budget), the council refused to even discuss trimming youth and children's

ministries. The support of the church and its leadership was absolutely key to the success of this ministry project.

At the heart of the project was the understanding that youth are fiercely relational, and events created to capitalize on and foster peer relationships were intentionally designed and implemented to reach the youth of this community. This context utilized a funnel approach to ministry in order to accomplish ministry to youth. If one pictures a funnel, they will find that the top of the funnel is the widest, and the funnel shrinks and becomes smaller as it gets to the bottom. Using this analogy, the top of the funnel is where events were designed to attract the most youth. These events were “fun” in nature, and had the least amount of “in your face” teachings about Jesus. This context never lost sight of the fact that this was a church, and every person walking into the doors knew that this was a church, and at every event there was some reference to Christ and his teachings. As one traveled down the funnel analogy, the emphasis on scriptural teachings increased while the numbers of participants decreased. The intention was to move the youth who came to large-scale outreach “fun” events down the funnel of ministry, with the ultimate goal being that youth would become members of, and participate in, the Discipleship Group offered by this church. The Scripture used as a foundation for this project, the story of the rich young ruler, played itself out in the funnel analogy whereby as the expectations for commitment to discipleship increased, many young people chose not to participate. Thus, when the numbers of participants in the ultimate goal of the Discipleship group are analyzed, one will find that there was roughly a 85% attrition rate...only fifteen percent of young people who this church had contact with had made

the journey through the offerings to make the commitment required of the Discipleship Group.

This is not to say, however, that the efforts with the other 85% have been in vain; it is quite the contrary. While the majority of youth have not elected to participate in the Discipleship Group, this project has increased the average weekly attendance by over 600% over a four year period. This church had its largest confirmation class in 2010, with thirteen young people making a decision to join the church. This is not a light decision, and these confirmands pledged to support this local church with their “gifts, presence, and prayers”. The regular attendees of the youth ministries of this church are constantly exposed to the Gospel message, and have shown their willingness to commit to deepening their own faith and relationship with Jesus.

Because of the type of community in which this church is located, an attempt was made at the inception of this project to include other churches. It was called “Community Youth”. Originally, four of the eight churches in the community (all of them protestant) signed on to the project. The idea was that if we got youth that were not from any church to participate, we would find out who they were connected to in one of the partner churches (family, friends, etc.), and provide that information to the partner church in an effort to connect a visitor with a church in the community. What ended up happening, however, is that this church carried the financial, organizational and operational weight of the ministry, and occasionally one of the other leaders of the churches would come. This community approach lasted only a few short months, and as the churches saw that their own youth were not flocking to this church, and that this church was not taking their

youth, interest from the other churches with the exception of one quickly waned. There was no sense of shared responsibility for the ministry to youth in the community. Several reasons for this were explored. In interviews with the other churches, it was determined that this church seemed to dominate because of their vast commitment and resources (other churches were not in a financial position to contribute), and there was not a sense of ownership. In retrospect, if a way could have been found for shared ownership, the idea of shared responsibility for the youth in our community might have been achieved. One of the obstacles to that shared ownership was the experience with one of the churches about a decade ago (see chapter 2) in which that church dominated the youth scene within the community, and eventually siphoned off many complete families from other churches. This created a sense of anger, hurt, frustration—and a huge sense of distrust among the churches. In looking back, this effort at a community youth would probably not have worked because of that distrust. However, this author believes that now that a sense of trust has been established (that trust being that this church is not out to proselytize or steal other members), the outcome might have been different had it been started from scratch. Working against a possible community youth group at this point is the momentum and reputation that this church has gained in the community as it relates to youth ministry; it would be difficult to stop what is currently happening in order to “share” ownership; the risk of a backward movement is too great. One of the other reasons that this group failed to gain traction is that when some large group activities were held, churches seemed to congregate together, and there was little interaction amongst the members of each church. This could have been easily rectified through a

change in programming and activities, but because most churches gave it so little time to work out the kinks, and because the churches did not share ownership in the group, this issue never came to a table for discussion until after the joint effort had all but dissolved.

The Funnel Approach

Top of the Funnel

At the top of the funnel, this project designed several large group activities designed to bring youth together for relational purposes, and to introduce them to the church. One of the largest endeavors was our 5th quarters. This was actually begun several years prior to this project's inception, but had fallen out of use for a few years. Since this church is located directly across the street from the high school (and the football field), and with the fact that this is a commuting community (there is no bus service, as almost all youth are within walking distance of the campus), this church was in a unique position to capitalize on the football games. The town lives for the varsity football games (ranked number one in its class, statewide, for several years running). For two hours after the football game, youth were invited into the church for snack food, fellowship and games. Prizes were awarded for various activities (such as first timers, bringing a friend, etc.) The participation ranged from a low of forty to a high of a hundred after each game. It was found that at the beginning, only about twenty percent of the participants were identified with the project church, so eighty percent were considered visitors. They were asked to fill out a form with their name, cell-phone, email address, home church, and with whom they came. Over the years, a significant number of youth gradually changed their church affiliation from "none" to Highland United

Methodist Church. Some of those never stepped foot in the door other than the large group activities at the top of the funnel, but they considered this church as the one to which they belonged. Later in the project, it was noted that several youth had dual identification; the church in which their family worshipped and Highland United Methodist (see Chapter 5). The 5th quarters became so popular that after the first year, a 3rd Friday (which was identical to a 5th quarter) was instituted in the months in which no football games were held. Because there was no event as a feeder (the football game), the numbers of participants decreased by about 20 percent, but this movement remained strong.

At the beginning of the implementation of the 5th quarters, there was a reluctance to say too much about Jesus and the Gospel for fear of driving youth away from the event. After the first year, that changed. When this particular ministry was evaluated, it was determined that that was a significant hole that we needed to fill, and that if some participation was lost because of an increase in presenting the Gospel, that was a risk worth taking. What was found, however, was when the heat was turned up on the presentation of the Gospel, youth did not leave. After all, they knew they were coming to a church. It was expected that something would be said. Gradually, the inclusion of prayer at the end of the gathering (in addition to a blessing), along with a ten or fifteen minute Gospel presentation (sometimes by peers) was incorporated into the program offering. During the second year of this project, we included papers upon which the youth were invited to write down prayer requests that the pastors and church would then pray over; the youth actually incorporated them into their Monday morning prayer time.

Several visiting youth did take the opportunity to share their concerns, although most checked the box “keep confidential”. Highland United Methodist Church was becoming known for its willingness to invest in youth, and to care for their souls (see Chapter 5, Table.8).

Another opportunity presented itself through food service. The high school has an open campus policy for lunch (primarily because of the lack of cafeteria space, but it has also been a “tradition” for decades). The youth can eat lunch on campus, walk home, or go to Subway or the Convenience Store. They are not allowed to drive anywhere or be picked up in cars. This led to the establishment of the “Underground”. The church was opened on Fridays (presently expanded to three days per week) to serve lunch. A combination of pizza, pretzels, chicken, hamburgers, hot dogs, and items like that are offered for sale. This was originally established to help pay for an increase in the youth ministry budget, but has since created substantial good-will among the youth in the community with the church. Highland United Methodist was creating a reputation as a safe place for kids to come and build relationships with each other. They felt welcomed and invited.

The fruits of the outreach efforts were enormous. Two events in particular stand out that were a direct result of these “top of funnel” activities. First, in the second year of this ministry project, a freshman on the football team suddenly died from a brain aneurism. Since this is a very small school (200 in each grade), the loss to the student body was tremendous. The day after the event, this church opened its sanctuary during the lunch hour for prayer and meditation, and put up a wall of butcher paper where the

students could come and write their feelings down. This church gave out lunch for free. Participation exceeded one hundred students. The next morning before school, a prayer and worship service was held. The family of the young man was invited to participate, which they did. Hundreds of youth and community filled the sanctuary to standing room only. The ministry of this church to the youth in the community was validated and firmly cemented. This early morning worship service was also the impetus for the Monday Morning Prayer ministry that followed shortly thereafter.

Secondly, there was a young man who occasionally participated in the 5th quarters and frequented the Underground for lunch. In the third year of this project, his mother died from cancer. The family had no church. The young man identified with Highland United Methodist, and came to this church for assistance. The church provided memorial services for the family and as a result this young man (although not the family) has become very involved in the youth program, moving down the funnel system to participation in small groups and Sunday evening activities.

This church also developed ministry opportunities at the top of the funnel in addition to the 5th quarter/3rd Friday approach. On a few occasions, Town and Country was rented for lock-ins (Town and Country being a local sports complex with swimming, soccer, basketball, etc.) This brought youth from the community out of the woodwork, one event handling over 120 youth. During the overnight, an hour of teaching and prayer was scheduled. It was found that in order to do these well, we needed significantly more adult involvement than we had, and more programming. While contributing to the reputation of the church as a place for youth, these overnights were not evaluated to be

overly successful from a ministry standpoint. Behavior issues that were never an issue in a short, tightly programmed environment surfaced, and the spiritual value was marginal. The value of lock-ins as an outreach tool is substantial, and when they are done again it will be done with significantly increased adult involvement, and significantly increased programmatic value.

Middle of the Funnel

At the middle of the funnel, one will find many of the “traditional” staples of youth ministry. These include worship, Sunday school, small groups, and Sunday night activities. These were designed so that young people might learn the stories of the Bible, and how they applied to their life. This church context did not deviate significantly from what you might find in any other mainline United Methodist congregation. That being said, there are a few “middle of the funnel” ministries that are worth lifting up as being extremely valuable to the success of this ministry project.

One of the most unique (and in the author’s opinion the most valuable and transformational) ministries in the middle of the funnel was the Monday morning prayer experience. This experience was birthed out of the morning worship and prayer time this church held during the death of the football team student in the second year of this ministry project. The Monday morning prayer was started at the beginning of the next school year. The rationale was that prayer and worship was the best way that one could start one’s week; it was hoped that it would be a time of encouragement and equipping our young people to face their week and be Christian witnesses. The format was simple; a song or two started the morning, a brief teaching time, group prayer, and then breakfast in

the youth room of the church. The worship time was held in the sanctuary to provide a sense of sacred space. Occasionally, the Lord's Supper was celebrated. There was no charge or request for donations for breakfast.

In the first year, the prayer time consisted of gathering in the front of the sanctuary, linking hands, and praying for each other (and the requests from the 5th quarter/3rd Friday). In the second year of this ministry, the "stool of awesomeness" was introduced. This was revolutionary for this ministry, and has endeared it into the hearts of the participants. The stool of awesomeness was a large wooden stool bought at a local furniture market. We chose one youth each Monday morning, brought that person up and had him/her sit on this stool. The group then laid hands on and prayed for this chosen youth. Usually five to seven youth would pray aloud for the student. Afterwards, the youth signed his/her name in indelible ink somewhere on the stool.

The result of this Monday morning prayer opportunity cannot be done justice with words. It has become the cornerstone and is on equal footing with the Discipleship Group (see next section) in its effectiveness in the lives of the young people, and in its transformational value to the ministry project. When it began, it had an average attendance of about a dozen, all from within the regular attending church families. As of January, 2011 (2 years after its inception), the attendance can reach over forty, and while the majority are still active church members, roughly twenty-five percent of participants are from families who do not regularly attend this church.

The second creative ministry within the middle of the funnel is the care groups. These groups were held in the homes of the care group leaders. Every youth was

assigned one of four care groups. These groups were mixed ages and genders. The idea was that this would be one area where age groups could be integrated (as the majority of the other areas were separated by Jr./Sr. high and even by grade). The care group leaders would function as small group leaders with the responsibility of connecting personally with each member of their group. These gatherings were held monthly throughout the year.

A final ministry in this section that is worth expounding upon is the Agape Feast. Patterned after Wesley's "Love Feast" concept, the Agape Feast happens a little more than quarterly, and is for the whole family. Families of the youth gather together for an outstanding dinner (steak/chicken type; not the staple youth food consisting of chips and pizza), and then the group gathers in the sanctuary (for the purpose of sacred space). In the sanctuary, an extended time of worship is held (led by youth), a teaching is given, and then many chairs are put around the sanctuary as "stools of awesomeness". Sometimes the youth are prayed for by their parents and families, and we have had parents placed on these stools and have the youth pray over their parents. At all times, hands are laid upon the person being prayed for. This has become very precious as much to the parents of the youth as to the youth themselves.

Bottom of the funnel--Discipleship Group

The Discipleship Group was the ultimate goal or destination of all the programming of youth ministry within this context and the project. The discipleship group is relational. It is intended that it is a voluntary group who are committed to long term relationships with each other that are close, supportive, loving, and mutually

accountable. It is not a pure friendship relationship, but rather a relationship where learning and growth occurs. It is designed such that the end result will be centrifugal in nature—it is not designed only for personal growth, but designed for service to others which then results in personal growth.

At the beginning of each school year, an open invitation was given to any youth that was willing to commit to the requirements of the group (Appendix A). It is of note that the parents were also required to sign that they would encourage and support their youth in fulfilling their requirements. At two other points in the year (January and June), invitations were extended to specific youth based on observations by the leadership and consultation with the group itself. The only “open enrollment” was in September of each year. By having an “open enrollment”, claims of selectivity and favoritism were quickly rebuffed, though they still did occur. There was a significant amount of angst on the part of some youth and parents because other priorities prevented some youth from participating in this group, and they were not able to enjoy the benefits of participation, primarily the retreats and service projects, which were both requirements for participation in this group.

The requirements for participation are steep. In order for the youth to take seriously their commitment, “grace passes” were created and then the name was changed to “yellow” and “red” cards (using a soccer analogy). When initially conceived, it was determined that there needed to be some flexibility in the participation requirements, allowing for illness, family vacations, sports, etc. Initially five “grace passes” which could be used for any reason were allotted per semester. A participant did not need to

have any reason or excuse to use a grace pass; if they did not feel like getting up on a Monday morning for prayer, they could just use a grace pass. No grace pass was needed for things that were beyond their families' control (such as illness or death in the family), but grace passes were needed for homework, sports, family vacations, etc. After one semester, the term was changed from "grace pass" to "yellow" or "red" cards. This was done so as not to theologically confuse the young people about God's grace being limited (although it did lend itself to some excellent and significant discussions about Paul's teaching about sinning so that grace might abound). If a person used all of the passes in a semester, he/she would be asked to drop out and re-enter during the next semester. This was done for a couple of reasons. First, it was felt that some emphasis needed to be placed on the value of commitment, and that there were natural consequences for failure to follow through. Secondly, the concept of community, especially within the "accountabilibuddy" structure, demanded regular, committed participation from all members, lest the group dynamics suffer significantly.

Although there was an open enrollment process, the perception of favoritism and selectivity had to be addressed. Some adults argued that this was not in keeping with the spirit of the church. The leadership wrestled with how to answer this, and went directly to Scripture. Scripture is full of Jesus "choosing" some over others (the seventy-two in Luke 10:1, the twelve in Luke 5:1-11, and even Jesus picking 3 out of those twelve to be closest to him in Peter, James and John) to be set aside for intense mentoring and training and for special ministries. Further supporting this method of separation in this project was John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. This project was based in large part upon Wesley's

class and band system which started the Methodist movement. It was in this system that Wesley placed people according to their willingness to follow the “rules” he established. One moved from one level to another based primarily upon one’s ability and willingness to do the work required in each group, but also upon one’s fitness as a Christian. It was from the example of Jesus and Wesley that the rationale and argument for this type of ministry was made.

A further struggle ensued when some youth wanted exceptions made to the program model. Because of the pressure to succeed academically and athletically, many youth who might otherwise participate in the discipleship group were eliminated because of those commitments. Many were eliminated because of sports commitments, and the leadership determined that this was something they were willing to live with. After all, select sports teams required a total commitment, and did not waver...either you committed or you were not able to participate. Another situation arose because some youth could not (or would not) wake up in time for Monday morning prayer. Arguments were raised that there is scientific evidence to support that teenagers are on a different sleeping cycle than the rest of the world. As the leadership struggled through that situation, they decided that this was not something they were willing to give up. Discipleship required a sacrifice. Getting up an hour earlier on Monday morning, while definitely a sacrifice, was a sacrifice we expected our youth to make. The leadership did end up making a decision for those youth who had an early-bird class (a class at school which met at 7 a.m.). Those youth were exempted unless early bird was cancelled or it was a holiday, in which case they were expected to participate in Monday morning

prayer. The youth did have seven yellow cards that they could use for any reason, and the leadership felt this was sufficient. A policy was also instituted stating that if a youth were from a blended family and the non-custodial parent was not in town or was not cooperative with the ministry requirements, the youth would not be penalized with a yellow card. Additionally, youth were not required to use a yellow card if they were ill or circumstances existed in their families that were beyond the youth or the family's control (parents were required to sign the form indicating their understanding of the rules; family dinners and vacations required the use of yellow cards).

There was much invested into this group by the church including personnel and financial resources. In addition to the Associate Pastor (this author), one other adult became totally dedicated to this group and invested a great deal of time and energy into teaching, leading, mentoring and equipping the individuals in this group to go deeper in their faith, serve others, and develop leadership skills among their peers. This commitment on her part took several hours per week in addition to giving up three to four weekends per year, and countless other hours in preparation and prayer. Leadership continuity and dedication was absolutely crucial to the success of this group. It would not have functioned as well with transient or partially dedicated leadership. This cannot be over emphasized. The youth needed to know that this was important to the church, and that adults were willing to invest of themselves into this project in order for them to feel it worthy of giving up all that was required to invest their own lives into this group.

A significant amount of financial resources were also poured into the Discipleship Group. This was the only group that went out of town on overnight retreats, and these

retreats were heavily subsidized (a three day trip to Hocking Hills with a zip-line tour cost the youth fifty dollars, approximately twenty percent of the cost of the actual trip). Each youth was also given a leather bible with his/her name inscribed. This created some concern amongst some other youth (especially parents), and this is an issue that had to be continually evaluated and re-evaluated.

Several different formats were attempted within this group, with varying amounts of success. At its inception, the two leaders alternated teaching times (two week sessions) and basically taught this group whatever was on their hearts at the moment. This proved to be disjointed, and was abandoned after a semester. During the second semester, an acrostic on the word DISCIPLESHIP was used (Appendix G). While somewhat more successful in that it was cohesive and had a direction and some structure around it, surveys of the participants indicated that they felt that this teaching time was the least valuable of all the core requirement of the discipleship group. As a result of that survey, this author interviewed a few of the youth in the group, and some of them expressed a feeling that the teaching time was “too babyfied” (a direct quote from one of the interviewees). The leadership struggled with this attitude, and wanted to find ways of correcting whatever was making this teaching time so unpopular. Teaching subjects and styles were analyzed in discussions amongst the leaders, staff and some parents. A possibility was explored that this was like “football practice”, where no one really likes the practice time but put up with it in order to “win the game”. In order to win the game, you just need to put one foot in front of the other and accomplish the task whether you enjoy it or not. However, when these youth comments were viewed in light of the survey

pre-and post- tests regarding attitudes (see Chapter 5, Table 18), the question had to be asked if these young people were ready for the essence of the gospel, as their behaviors were not reflective of a person who was ready to ingest the meat of the scripture. There was little or no change in their prayer, bible reading, or financial giving—all key indicators of a growing relationship with Jesus. Because these young people had made a commitment of time and energy to this group, it was decided to “turn up the heat” on the teaching, and really focus on what it means to be growing in Jesus. (See appendix H for a teaching topic and outline). A new format was instituted whereby the youth would gather for a snack and introductory remarks, and were then sent to their accountability buddy groups to discuss their progress during the week. After that, they were split between girls and boys and the youth were expected to volunteer answers to the questions on the handouts. It was an “in your face” and “no holds barred” type of discussion. As of the writing of this chapter, this seems to be going well.

The scripture chosen as the rationale for this project, the parable of the rich young ruler, provided an opportunity for significant reflection of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Here, one finds the disciples witnessing an interaction between Jesus and the rich young ruler. This ruler came seeking Jesus, realizing that there was something missing in his life. By all accounts, this ruler was a kind and generous man, and when Jesus tells him to go sell everything or he cannot enter receive eternal life, the disciples were amazed. Surely, they thought, if anyone could get into heaven, the rich man could. Jesus turned the values of the world upside down. What was at stake here was not material possessions; it was who or what was claiming lordship in this man’s life. For

Jesus, it was an all or nothing proposition. The Bible does not speak fondly of lukewarm Christianity. Jesus never spoke in shades of gray. How does this teaching impact the ministry of youth, especially in this context? What Jesus was speaking to in this man's life was his willingness to submit to the Lordship of Christ. Jesus knew what this man valued. He knew that money, power and status were the lord of the young ruler. Jesus seems to be saying that one cannot attain salvation until one submits to the Lordship of Christ. It is in this context that the Discipleship Group operated; teaching our young people to submit their lives—heart, mind and soul—to the Lordship of Christ Jesus. In Wesleyan theology, justifying grace qualifies us for heaven, and sanctifying grace fits us for heaven. While not a works based salvation theology, it is clear that one must be continually sanctified to hold on to one's salvation. The fundamental goal of the Discipleship Group was sanctified (or holy) living. To this end, the accountability buddy groups were formed in order for them to hold each other accountable for their behaviors and growth, and the teaching focused on holy living.

Through the surveys of the Discipleship Group, it was determined that one of the major obstacles to holy living was a lack of assurance or knowledge that God loved and cared for them personally. In the pre and post surveys, this particular category demonstrated the largest increase in response (see Chapter 5, Table 18). It was determined that these young people needed an assurance of their salvation, and of their value to God in order to move them to the point that they were willing to submit their thoughts, words and deeds to the Lordship of Christ. This was done primarily through our benediction process at the close of every gathering in the total youth ministry project, not

just the Discipleship Group. Those words varied somewhat, but always included “go in God’s love, grace and mercy, knowing that God loves you more than you can possibly imagine, and that your name is written on the palm of his hand”. This message was constantly communicated at every possible moment, both through the words and the actions of the leadership. Just the fact that adult leaders were willing to commit so much to them spoke volumes.

Another aspect of the Discipleship Group was that they would take leadership amongst their peers in the youth ministry program. This was done in a couple of different ways. First, many of the Discipleship Group functioned as leaders within their Care Groups (previously described). Secondly, a Barnabas ministry was established. Each youth was assigned two or three youth in the ministry, and he/she was responsible for periodically calling to encourage them, and to solicit their prayer requests. This helped to make sure that no youth “fell through the cracks”. While not yet implemented, it is planned that each of the accountability buddy teams will pool all of their youth together and gather at a restaurant so that the Discipleship Group participants can lead a lesson and prayer time with all of their Barnabas group assignees.

The most significant disappointment and deficit in this ministry project and in the Discipleship Group specifically, was the lack of focus on service projects. Over and over, the youth (and to some extent the parents) expressed a desire for more service opportunities. The challenge here was finding meaningful opportunities for youth of this age that did not require significant amounts of financial resources and time. Because of the sheer volume of ongoing weekly commitment to the Discipleship Group (and other

pulls on the leadership), as well as the financial commitment required, week-long mission projects were not pursued. An attempt was made at periodic (even regular) opportunities for ministry to others, but it was difficult to find opportunities that were organized to take teenagers. Most accepted only adults, and the few that did accept teens were often booked a year in advance. An attempt was made to partner with a small church within a government housing project in a neighboring community, but that church was not organized enough to have young people come help, and there was a real concern for the safety of the young people. The safety concern has since been mitigated with their hiring of a new director, and an attempt will be made again during the coming summer to again establish a relationship with that church. Several attempts were made at other opportunities to serve, but those turned out to be superficial opportunities that did not bear much fruit either to the organization or to the young people within this fellowship.

Conclusion

Overall, this ministry project was a rousing success. Through a focus on relationship building among teen peers, a ministry to a dozen members of this context church exploded by five hundred percent over a four year period to a ministry with a significant outreach component that was bringing young people into the fellowship of believers. This ministry project also proved that one could expect young people to become radically devoted followers of Christ who would give up much of what was important to them to be relationally connected to each other and to Jesus.

The crux of this project was creating room for relationships to be developed in a healthy, Christ-centered environment. It was hoped that, through ministries created to

foster peer relationships, relationships with loving adults and, ultimately, with Jesus would occur.

This church succeeded in creating a reputation in the community among the target teen demographics. The survey results show that all the youth who answered the survey had an overwhelmingly positive impression of Highland United Methodist and their care for teenagers. Through the food service ministry, this church created welcoming space even for those who do not consider themselves Christian; this too was reflected in the survey results.

This project also succeeded in bringing youth into the church who had no previous affiliation with any church. The participation in the Discipleship Group of four youth who were not from families who attend this church shows that the appeal of this project exceeded the bounds of the membership of the church, and as such created successful venues for outreach ministry.

The next steps for this ministry include creating more (or reworking current) “middle of the funnel” ministry opportunities that push the youth into a deeper commitment to the sake of Christ, providing more opportunities to serve others, and sharing this experience with other churches so that they too, might experience the joy of seeing young people come into a meaningful relationship with Jesus.

APPENDIX A

DISCIPLESHIP GROUP REQUIREMENTS

- Attendance at Monday morning prayer
- Attendance at weekly worship
- Attendance in Sunday school or other weekly peer Bible study
- Participation quarterly in a service project (feeding the poor, doing for others)
- Attendance at Sunday evening Discipleship Group
- Willingness to ask yourself tough questions
- Willingness to be held accountable
- Participation in a 2 night retreat only for those who have committed to this program
- Participation in leadership in some other aspect of church life (worship, barnabas group, care groups, other ministry teams)

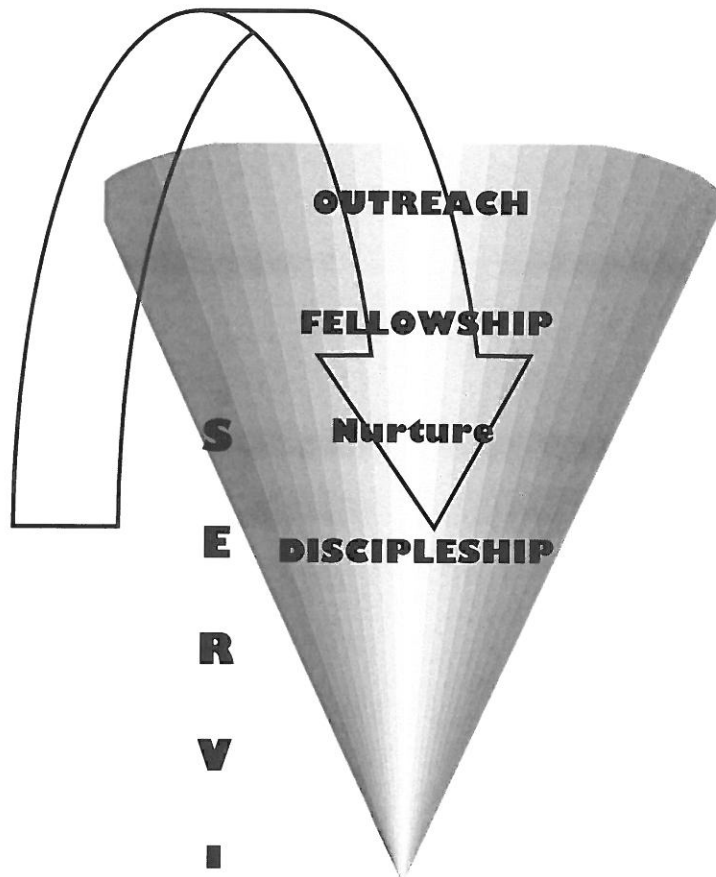
APPENDIX B-

WESLEY'S MODIFIED QUESTIONS

1. How is it with your soul this week? Have you been connecting with God? How have you nurtured your love for God and others?
2. How have you been tempted this week? How have you overcome that temptation?
3. Have you fulfilled the obligations of the Discipleship Group?
4. How have you done good for others, or how have you refrained from doing harm?

APPENDIX C

FUNNEL SYSTEM



APPENDIX D

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF HIGHLAND UNITED METHODIST YOUTH MINISTRIES

Top of Funnel Ministries

- 5th Quarter and 3rd Fridays: This is the primary ongoing outreach effort of this ministry project. After each home football game (and on the third Friday's in non-football months), the church opens its doors for two hours in the late evening (9-11 p.m.) after the football game (or after other scheduled activities should be completed). This event is totally free to any participant. Snacks are provided, games are held for the purposes of interaction, prizes are given away (primarily as door prizes for coming and bringing a new person), and a brief teaching time is held. At the end of this evening, youth generally are offered an opportunity (usually in writing) to request prayer, the group is linked (holds hands), and a brief prayer and benediction are given.
- Lock-in's: These are held intermittently, and what usually happens is that a venue (such as a sports center or Lazer Tag outlet) is rented. Youth can bring friends (greatly encouraged), and in the middle of the night, a teaching and prayer time is held. Youth do pay admission (although it is heavily subsidized so as to not leave anyone out).

Middle of the Funnel Ministries

- Sunday School: Separated by age group. This is where focus is made on learning the Bible, its stories and characters.
- Confirmation: Held annually for those in 7th grade and above; this is held as a teaching session on the basic tenants of the Christian faith as well as the unique aspect of Methodism.

- Wednesday Nights: Separated by Jr. /Sr. High, and often by gender. These take on more of a small group format
- Care Groups: This is a small group experience lead in the homes of adult care group leaders. The care group leaders function as pastors to their assigned group. They are asked to call each person in their group prior to the meetings, be aware of any special things that might be happening in their lives and to follow up with those needs. A typical Sunday would include dinner, a teaching time, prayer time, games and fellowship and celebrating of birthdays. Birthday celebrations are done in the care group setting so that each youth has an opportunity to celebrate their special day each year, which would not be possible in the context of the larger group ministries.
- Koinanea Groups: The word “Koinanea” in Scripture means “fellowship”. It is an intimate fellowship; one that is more than just merely having an acquaintance with another person. This year, we want to try something different, by breaking our youth into grade-level Koinanea groups. These groups will meet on Sunday evenings, and will generally be broken down as follows: 6th grade, 7th grade, 8th grade, 9th grade and 10-12th grade. These will be led by adults who will commit to remaining with their age-level group for the entire year on Sunday nights.
- Monday Morning Prayer: Monday morning, youth of all ages gather to begin their week with Worship, prayer, a Scripture meditation and breakfast. The “stool of awesomeness” is used each week and this is where someone is chosen to sit on that stool and hands are laid upon that person where thanks is given for that

APPENDIX E

DISCIPLE ACROSTIC

- Determines to walk by faith
- Influences others for Christ
- Studies God's Word
- Connects with God's people
- Imitates God's generosity
- Prays for God's guidance
- Loves other people
- Excels in all they do
- Serves God and others

APPENDIX F

DISCIPLESHIP GROUP TEACHING TOPIC EXAMPLE

- TUESDAY: Look at Galatians 5:22-23. These are the fruits of the spirit. None of us has mastered every “fruit of the spirit”, but we are better at some than others. What fruits do you do well at? What fruits do you need to work the most on?
- WEDNESDAY: Read Ephesians 5:18. There are things that we do that get in the way of the spirit. Paul was talking about drinking, but it could have been anything. For us, it could be things like sports, or pursuing academics at the expense of our spiritual health. It could be a sin, such as pornography or greed, or slander or gossip...What is that thing (or those things) that God might be saying to you is hindering the Holy Spirit from working in your life?
- THURSDAY: Time for a gut-check. Don’t blow this off. Read Ephesians 4:30 and 1 John 1:5-8. What in your life is grieving the Holy Spirit today? Spend time asking for forgiveness, with the certain knowledge that when we do confess, he is “faithful and just to forgive” and that he throws our sins “as far as the east is from the west”.
- FRIDAY: Read 1 Thessalonians 5; 12-24. What “next steps” in your life can you think of when you read this Scripture? Where do you need to invest in yourself and in others? What “evil” do you need to stay away from?

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